



OCTOBER 2024

Propaganda, Procurement and Lethal Operations

Iran's Activities Inside America

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

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Executive Summary

- The Islamic Republic of Iran and its network of proxies (often identified as Axis of Resistance) have a long history of activities targeting the United States, as opposing America constitutes one of their foundational dogmas. Said activities range from influence operations and propaganda to terrorist and military attacks.
- Tensions between the two sides have substantially escalated in the wake of the October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel and the conflict that followed, making an assessment of these activities and their possible future developments highly relevant.
- While most of the anti-American activities by Iran and its proxies have been carried out in the greater Middle East, some of them have taken place inside America. Iran and its proxies have, in fact, been operating inside the United States for decades, engaging in a broad array of nefarious activities that can be divided into three main categories: lethal operations, procurement and propaganda.
- Lethal operations:
 - Iran has a history of carrying out assassinations inside America that dates back to 1980, when it commissioned the assassination of an Iranian dissident in Bethesda, MD.
 - While in recent years dissidents have been targeted with increasing frequency, Iran has also escalated its target selection by including US-based foreign diplomats and, even more brazenly, high ranking US officials.
 - Most of these plots appear to have been outsourced to hired guns, a choice largely dictated by necessity, but that also offers the Iranian regime the advantage of plausible deniability. The proxies so far used by Tehran to carry out assassinations inside the US have tended to be elements who were not ideologically aligned (mostly from the criminal underworld) and who displayed relatively low levels of professionalism.
- Procurement: Iranian-linked networks have also been active on American soil for decades to procure sensitive goods (high-tech equipment, dual-use tech, software, etc.), and conduct financial activities in violation of US sanctions. Schemes used have at times been very elaborate, amounting to hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Propaganda: America is home to a broad web of entities (mosques, Islamic centers, schools, student groups) and individuals with close personal, financial, organizational, and ideological links to the Iranian regime and its proxies. They spread Iran's religious and political worldview, glorifying the regime and its allies, undermining America and disseminating antisemitic views.
 - The New York-based Alavi Foundation is arguably the most prolific actor in the spread of Iranian regime influence in the United States. With its multimillion-dollar budget, it either directly owns or funds through grants, no-interest loans, and donations a broad array of mosques and

entities nationwide that disseminate Tehran's viewpoint. In 2008, the Department of Justice filed a civil forfeiture complaint against Alavi, arguing that it "secretly served as a front for the Iranian government and as a gateway for millions of dollars to be funneled to Iran in clear violation of U.S. sanctions laws." In 2017, a jury found Alavi guilty, but the judgment was overturned by the appellate court due to procedural errors in the district court's rulings. The legal battle is ongoing.

- This report identified more than a dozen organizations that disseminate pro-Iranian regime and pro-Hezbollah viewpoints and operate schools and mosques nationwide that host radical preachers who weave anti-US and antisemitic sentiments throughout their teachings. Some of the most important ones are based in Houston, New York and Potomac, Maryland. Additionally, Dearborn, Michigan is a particularly important hub, as it hosts several prominent institutions disseminating Tehran's worldview.
- Many of the key individuals behind this web of entities maintain close connections to the Iranian regime, frequently traveling to Iran and actively participating in Iranian soft power organizations like Ahlul Bayt World Assembly and Al-Mustafa International University.
- Many of the Iran-aligned institutions identified in the report host events like commemorations of the anniversary of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the anniversary of the death of Iran's first post-revolution Supreme Leader,

Ayatollah Khomeini; ceremonies memorializing the lives of IRGC-Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Hezbollah spiritual leader Hussein Fadlallah; and Quds Day, a day of protest against Israel declared by Khomeini in 1979 and commemorated the last Friday of every Ramadan.

- Particularly troubling is the presence in the suburbs of various American cities of Islamic schools—some of which receiving state funding—that teach the Iranian regime's interpretation of Islam and political worldview to scores of American children.
- US authorities have repeatedly highlighted that "Iran typically relies on individuals with preexisting access to the United States for surveillance and lethal plotting" and, similarly, that "the arrests of individuals in the United States allegedly linked to Hezbollah's main overseas terrorist arm and their intelligence collection and procurement efforts demonstrate Hezbollah's interest in long-term contingency planning activities here in our homeland." In substance, the possibility that Iran and its proxies could mobilize known and trusted assets based in the US rather than hired guns to carry out some kind of violent action in the future is a concrete one. In light of these dynamics, procurement and propaganda networks should be seen as natural recruitment pools for Iranian security apparatuses and their proxies seeking to plan attacks.
- Hezbollah is the oldest and most established of Iran's proxies. It has long operated in the US, and Program on Extremism research has identified 142 US-based individuals who have been prosecuted for Hezbollah-related activities since 2000.

Most individuals provided financial assistance to the group as money launderers/ bundlers/fraudsters and goods smugglers. About 13% of the prosecutions related to individuals who provided operational support as human smugglers, weapons procurers, and surveillance operatives. Clusters of friends or family members, some of them based out of Michigan, New York, California and North Carolina, play a central role in Hezbollah's activities in the United States, particularly in fundraising operations.

- Iran and its proxies are also active in Canada and many Latin American countries. Exactly as in the US, their activities in those countries range from the creation of extensive propaganda centers to networks engaged in procurement and other financial activities and, occasionally, terrorist attacks (most recently, Brazil thwarted an alleged Hezbollah attack against Jewish targets in 2023). Many Latin American countries constitute a highly permissive environment that allows Tehran and its proxies to operate almost undisturbed. This dynamic poses a security challenge, not just to those countries, but also to the United States, given their geographical proximity.
- Given the heightened geopolitical tensions that have followed the October 7, 2023 attacks and Iran's unrelenting commitment to highly adversarial positions towards the United States, an in-depth understanding of its networks inside the US and throughout the Western Hemisphere is of paramount importance. This required awareness applies not just to actors who are directly engaged in violent actions, but also to procurement and propaganda networks, as they not only serve useful roles for Tehran in and of itself, but can also potentially be utilized to support or carry out attacks.

Introduction

The conflict that ensued after the October 7, 2023, attacks in Israel laid bare a dynamic that had been building up in the Middle East for decades: the growth and increasing aggressiveness of an Iranian-led informal coalition of groups and militia spanning most of the region. Commonly referring to itself as “Axis of Resistance,” it is a network of violent actors that, while retaining varying degrees of independence, operate as proxies for Tehran, allowing the Iranian regime to project power throughout the Middle East and beyond.^[1]

Iran has strategically built this network over decades, mostly by empowering or *de facto* creating militant Shia Muslim groups. It began with Hezbollah, whose founding in 1982 by Shia militants in the context of the Lebanese civil war and Israel’s invasion of the country received critical assistance from Tehran. Hezbollah is the model Iranian proxy and, according to the State Department, Iran to date “continues to provide Hizballah with most of its funding, training, weapons, and explosives, as well as political, diplomatic, monetary, and organizational aid.”^[2]

Over the years, taking advantage of similarly chaotic political and sectarian dynamics, Iran built patron-client relationships in other countries. In neighboring Iraq, Iran began forcefully backing Shia militia that appeared amidst the chaos and sectarian strife that followed the 2003 US invasion of the country. These armed groups gained substantial combat experience and consequent political clout as they played a role in defeating the Islamic State in the country, becoming a *de facto* state within the state. Several of these militia, including the US-designated Kata’ib Hezbollah (KH), Harakat al

Nujaba (HN), and Asa’ib Ahl al Haq (AAH), have a long history of attacks against US targets in the country.^[3]

Iranian-backed militia are also extremely active in Syria, where Tehran has long been one of the main backers of the regime of Bashar al Assad. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Iran has built a network of militia active throughout the country by both mobilizing local Shia populations and deploying foreign fighters.^[4] In Yemen, Iran has long supported Ansar Allah, the Shia militant group more widely known as the Houthis. Since 2015, thanks also to sustained financial and military support from Iran, the Houthis have come to control the capital, Sana’a, and large sections of the country. And the Iranian regime has also made headway into Afghanistan and Pakistan, where it influences and recruits fighters within the countries’ Shia minority populations.

Hamas, despite being a Sunni group, has in recent years also fallen into the orbit of the Shia-dominated Axis of Resistance. A friendly relationship dates back to the late 1980s but has intensified since Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007. In 2023, the State Department estimated that Iran provides “up to \$100 million annually in combined support to Palestinian terrorist groups, including Hamas.”^[5] While Iran’s precise role in the October 7th events is unclear, the White House has stated that Iran is “broadly complicit in these attacks,” as Hamas’s “primary backer for decades.”^[6]

Iran’s relationships with its proxies are flexible, with the latter at times prioritizing their own goals and objectives. Nevertheless, they all constitute a cost-effective *longa manus* of the

Iranians, allowing them to “enhance their power projection capabilities, provide plausible deniability for attacks conducted on behalf of the Iranian regime and create instability for Iran's enemies in the region.”^[7] Indeed, the successes of Iran's proxies are many, enabling Tehran to *de facto* control countries (such as Lebanon and Yemen) and deeply influence the politics of others (Iraq); intimidate regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia; and indirectly strike enemies ranging from the Islamic State to Israel.

Moreover, Axis of Resistance proxies constitute a key weapon utilized by the Iranian regime to influence, intimidate, harass and at times strike the United States. Since its foundation in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has seen America as its main enemy, the proverbial Great Satan. Iran's anti-American rhetoric is pervasive and incessant, omnipresent in materials from school curricula to mosque sermons, from street signs to statements by top clerics and political leaders. All Axis of Resistance members adopt this stance towards the United States. Hezbollah's rhetoric is similarly permeated by anti-Americanism and, tellingly, in June 2024 Hezbollah Foreign Relations Chief Khalil Rizk stated that “Israel is just a tool; Our real war is with America.”^[8] Equally revealing is the Houthis' motto: “God is great, death to the U.S., death to Israel, curse the Jews, and victory for Islam.”^[9]

This animosity towards the US has historically been expressed not just in words. Rather, there is a long line of violent actions perpetrated against the US at times by Iran directly but, more often, by its proxies. The 1979 siege of the US embassy in Tehran, which resulted in 53 American diplomats and citizens being held hostage for more than a year, and the 1983 suicide bombings by Hezbollah which targeted the US embassy (April 18th, 63 killed, including 17 Americans) and the Marines Corps headquarters in Beirut (October 23rd, 241 military personnel

killed) were just the first salvos of a long litany of attacks against America.

In fact, over the last 45 years, Iran and its proxies have constantly carried out military and terrorist activities against the US, often increasing or decreasing the intensity of their actions based on their overall strategy and the political tensions of the moment. The October 7, 2023 attacks have triggered a new surge in these tensions and, consequently, US interests in the region have been under sustained attack by various Axis of Resistance members. US forces in both Syria and Iraq have been the targets of attacks by local Shia militia linked to Iran and, in January 2024, Iraq-based militants killed three US servicemembers at a base in Jordan with a drone. Similarly, since October 7, the Houthis have been engaged in a campaign to attack US and international vessels in the Red Sea. These actions have led the US to deploy military assets in the region and carry out several military strikes against Axis of Resistance members in various countries.

It is clear that, given their openly declared desire to strike the United States and the repeated circumstances in which, over the last decades, they actually followed through on their threats, Iran and the Axis of Resistance pose a direct security challenge to the United States. This assessment rings even more true in the context of the dramatically more heightened post-October 7 tensions.

While it is therefore crucially important to understand the threats posed by Iran and the Axis of Resistance to US interests in the broader Middle East, it is also critical to assess the presence of Iranian regime actors and their proxies inside America. Understanding the kind of foothold they have inside the US, how they operate, and the activities they engage in is crucial to assess the level of threat they pose to the homeland.

This report seeks to do exactly that. As its title, *Propaganda, Procurement and Lethal Operations: Iran's Activities Inside America*, suggests, the report looks at three separate but deeply interconnected aspects of the presence of Iranian regime actors and their proxies in the United States. Following a critical matrix in political violence, it analyses the words, the goods and the deeds utilized by Iran and Axis of Resistance actors to project their influence inside America.

The report is divided into various parts. The first examines the plots by Iranian agents and their proxies to carry out acts of violence inside the United States, from the 1980 assassination of former Iranian Embassy press attaché Ali Akbar Tabatabaei in suburban Washington, to the more recent plots to kill Iranian dissidents and high-ranking US officials. The section shows a clear pattern of heightened boldness on the part of Iranian security actors, which in recent years have increased the number of plots and raised the profile of their targets on US soil.

The second section examines the various networks set up by Iranian security actors to obtain goods in violation of US sanctions or to illegally raise funds. This section shows how Iranian security actors use a variety of proxies, which might or might not be ideologically aligned, to conduct these procurement activities, which at times can be remarkably complex.

The third and largest section, the core of the study, maps out US-based Islamic centers, mosques, schools, student organizations and cultural initiatives that, with a varying degree of intensity, are linked to the Iranian regime and/or disseminate propaganda that is clearly aligned with Tehran's view.

Two additional sections complement the rest of the study. Underscoring the importance of the

impact on the US of activities in neighboring countries, one section examines the activities of Iran and its proxies in Canada and Latin America. The final section focuses on Hezbollah, analyzing the activities of the Lebanese terrorist organization in both the United States and Canada.

The report, a collective effort by Program on Extremism staff, is based on a multi-source approach. Official government documents, such as unclassified intelligence reports, court records, congressional testimonies and tax/property filings constituted indispensable sources. PoE staff also conducted ample research on Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube and several other social media platforms, particularly to obtain additional insights into the messaging and rhetoric used by the actors included in the report. Media reporting was used as an ancillary source. Research was conducted in English, Arabic, Farsi and Spanish.

The report is the first of its kind, as the Program is not aware of any other extensive survey of pro-Iranian networks inside the US. The topic is very complex and inherently opaque. For this reason, the study does not have the ambition of being fully comprehensive of every pro-Iranian actor in America. Rather, it seeks to draw an extensive sketch of these networks, identifying both key players and patterns of activities. Despite these inevitable limits, the report should constitute an important evidence-based tool to shape the conversation about a substantial security challenge for the United States.

The report does not cover the activities of Hamas in America. While the Palestinian terrorist organization has, as said, unquestionably become a part of the Iran-led Axis of Resistance, its presence in America, which is extensive and dates back decades, predates these synergies with Iran and has only

rarely seen interactions with Tehran and Axis of Resistance actors. In substance, while not completely disconnected from Iran and its proxies, Hamas' history, presence and activities

in America deserve a separate analysis — something the Program on Extremism partially did with its October 2023 report, *The Hamas Network in America: A Short History*.^[10]

TEXTBOX 1

Iran's security actors

In order to understand Iran's activities inside the United States, it is important to first examine the nature and functions of the country's security apparatuses and how they influence the regime's US-based strategies. Like most governments, Iran has various security apparatuses whose functions and roles differ. Some of these agencies focus primarily on activities within Iran and border countries, while others directly operate in and/or impact the United States.

a. The Police

The NAJA (Nirou-ye Entezami-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Iran) is the country's main police force and operates under the Ministry of Interior.^[11] It is responsible for typical local law enforcement activities and criminal investigations and does not normally participate in activities outside of Iran's borders.

b. The Artesh

Iran's conventional military forces are referred to as Artesh and are organized into an army, navy, and air force. The Artesh's repeated involvement in coup attempts during the early days of the Islamic Republic combined with the heavy losses it suffered during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) have placed the Army somewhat on the periphery in terms of influence, funding, and impact outside of Iran's borders.

c. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

The IRGC is the primary defense force for the Iranian regime, separate from the conventional military force,^[12] and it is responsible for most covert activities outside of Iran, including inside the United States. The IRGC was instituted after the fall of the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979.^[13] Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini wanted to counterbalance the institutions inherited from the previous regime to protect his own from a coup d'état. In order to do so, the IRGC was conceived as the "people's army"^[14] and was designed to fulfill functions related to internal security, external defense, and regime survival.^[15] Over time, the IRGC transformed into a more conventional armed force.^[16]

^[13] It is worth noting that it was in the latter stages of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) that transformed the IRGC into a more conventional fighting force: "Backgrounder: Iran's Revolutionary Guards." Council on Foreign Relations, April 17, 2024. Accessed June 17, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/irans-revolutionary-guards>

The IRGC has various branches, which include:

- i. The **Basij**: Created less than a year after the IRGC, it has become the largest civil militia organization in the world, with around five million members.^[17] The Basij maintains internal security and additionally functions as a domestic intelligence agency, thanks to its capillary presence throughout the country.^[18]
- ii. The **Quds Force (IRGC-QF)** is the clandestine military wing of the IRGC. It was conceived as the IRGC's arm to deal with external affairs.^[19] From 1998 until his death on January 2, 2020, Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani was the IRGC-QF's commander-in-chief.^[20] It was under his leadership that the IRGC-QF developed into an elite military unit, implementing a "hybrid warfare" doctrine.^[21] The Quds Force plays a key role in developing and controlling Iran's web of proxies throughout the region.
- iii. The **IRGC Intelligence Organization (IRGC-IO)** is a branch dedicated to both domestic and international intelligence operations.
- iv. The **Cyber Electronic Command (IRGC-CEC)** is a branch of the IRGC dedicated to cyber activities.

The US Treasury Department designated the IRGC-QF as a terrorist organization in October 2007.^[22] The US Department of State designated the entire IRGC as a terrorist organization in April 2019.^[23] In February 2024, the US Government sanctioned leaders of the IRGC-CEC "for a series of malicious cyber activities against critical infrastructure in the United States and other countries."^[24]

c. The Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)

The MOIS, which is also referred to as VEVAK (Veazarat-e Ettela'at va Amniat-e Keshvar), is the evolution of Iran's pre-revolutionary National Intelligence and Security Organization, also called SAVAK.^[25] The US government has repeatedly sanctioned the MOIS.^[26] In 2012, it designated MOIS as Iran's "primary intelligence organization" "for its support to terrorist groups as well as its central role in perpetrating human rights abuses against the citizens of Iran and its role in supporting the Syrian regime as it continues to commit human rights abuses against the people of Syria."^[27]

In 2022, the US Treasury Department designated the MOIS "for engaging in cyber-enabled activities against the United States and its allies."^[28] It noted that "since at least 2007, the MOIS and its cyber actor proxies have conducted malicious cyber operations targeting a range of government and private-sector organizations around the world and across various critical infrastructure sectors."^[29]

Lethal Operations

Iran's involvement in lethal operations on US soil dates back to the earliest days of the Islamic Republic's foundation. On the morning of July 22, 1980, Ali Akbar Tabatabaei, a former press attaché at the Iranian Embassy in Washington, was shot dead on the doorstep of his Bethesda, MD home.^[30] Since the 1979 Revolution, Tabatabaei had been a staunch opponent of the Iranian regime and authorities immediately suspected a political motive for his murder. What they quickly came to learn was that Tabatabaei's killer was a North Carolina native and former Baptist named David Theodore Belfield. Belfield, an African-American convert to Sunni Islam who also went by the name Dawud Salahuddin, had been paid \$5,000 by Iranian officials to conduct the assassination.^[31]

Belfield left America a few hours after the murder, reportedly finding shelter in the Geneva home of Said Ramadan, the right-hand man of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al Banna. Belfield eventually reached Iran, where he has been living ever since and has worked for various English language publications controlled by the Iranian regime. "I was primed for violence, and I thought about cratering the White House a quarter century before Al Qaeda did," said Belfield in a 2002 interview with *The New Yorker*.^[32] "It would be accurate to say that my biggest aspiration was to bring America to its knees, but I didn't know how."^[33]

The Tabatabaei assassination is a forerunner of dynamics seen ever since, with Iranian security services using proxies with varying degrees of ideological alignment to the regime to carry out assassinations and intimidatory activities on US soil. Historically, the main targets of these

operations have been dissidents, Iranian activists who have used the freedoms they found in America to voice their criticism of the Iranian regime and lobby against it.



Figure 1: FBI Most Wanted: Naji Sharifi Zindashti.^[34]

Iranian-led plots against dissidents appear to have increased in recent years and have involved a diverse set of actors. A prominent case is that of the Zindashti criminal network, named after its leader, Naji Shafiri Zindashti.^[35] Zindashti has been linked to multiple lethal plots connected to MOIS since at least 2017.^[36] From December 2020 through March 2021, his network was involved in a conspiracy to murder two US citizens who had previously fled Iran

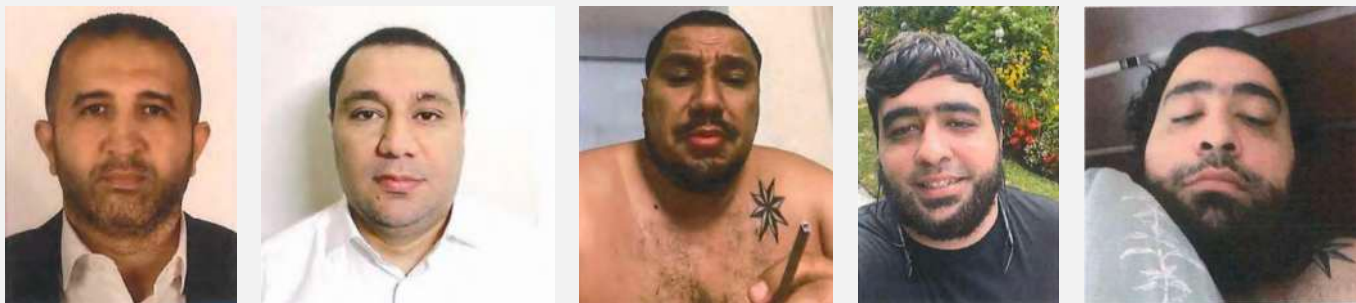
and had settled in Maryland.^[37] Zindashti hired two Canadian residents, Damion Patrick John Ryan, a member of the Hells Angels Motorcycle gang, and Adam Richard Pearson, to conduct the murder.^[38] Zindashti offered to pay Ryan and Pearson, and supplied them with photographs and maps to facilitate their job.^[39] The men communicated through an encrypted service called SkyECC, which allows users to send and receive encrypted messages through a pin code.^[40] On January 29, 2024, Zindashti and his network were indicted for the murder-for-hire conspiracy.^[41]

Additionally, the US designated these individuals as terrorists for these activities, and the US Treasury Department noted the network “operates at the behest of Iran’s Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS).”^[42]

she would have been detained and transported to Iran.^[46] Iranian officials at first offered to pay the family if they agreed to collaborate, but they refused. One of Alinejad's relatives in Iran was arrested and sentenced to eight years prison on charges based on the relative's association with Alinejad.^[47] During that time and for years afterward, Iranian assets maintained constant surveillance of Alinejad through private investigators.^[48] They also researched potential escape routes from her home, using a waterfront neighborhood in Brooklyn and speed boats to facilitate their escape to Venezuela, a country whose regime is a close ally of Iran.^[49]

In July 2021, the presiding Southern District of New York court unsealed an indictment of the men behind the plot. The ringleader is alleged

Figure 2: From left to right: the first picture is Rafat Amirov; the following two pictures are Polad Omarov; and the last two images are Khalid Mehdieyev. ^[43]



Iranian security services have also repeatedly tried to kidnap and kill a prominent Iranian (naturalized US citizen) human rights activist based out of Brooklyn, Masih Alinejad.^[44] At first, Iranian intelligence tried to reach her through her family.^[45] In 2018, Iranian government officials contacted Alinejad's relatives in Iran in an attempt to convince them to invite her to travel to a third country. There,

to be Alireza Shahvaroghi Farhani, an Iranian intelligence official. Farhani led a team of Iranian intelligence operatives and assets who were mostly based out of Iran but that also included an Iranian native who resides in California and who is accused of having provided financial services that supported the plot.^[50] “The government of Iran,” explained Assistant Director Alan E. Kohler Jr. of the FBI’s

Counterintelligence Division, “directed a number of state actors to plot to kidnap a U.S.-based journalist and American citizen, and to conduct surveillance on U.S. soil - all with the intention to lure our citizen back to Iran as retaliation for their freedom of expression.”^[51]

Masih Alinejad was also the target of a second plot a year later, this time through a murder-for-hire scheme. Iranian authorities tasked Rafat Amirov, the leader of an Eastern European criminal organization who resides in Iran, to mobilize contacts in the criminal underworld to kill the Brooklyn-based dissident. In July 2022, Amirov sent targeting information he had received in Iran to his associate Polad Omarov, who was based between the Czech Republic and Slovenia. Omarov sent the information to Khalid Mehdiyev, who resided in Yonkers, New York.^[52]

Mehdiyev began extensive surveillance of Alinejad's residence, sharing the information with Omarov and Amirov in Iran. Shortly thereafter he received a payment of \$30,000 and used part of it to buy an AK-47-style assault rifle and ammunition. Mehdiyev spent various days armed in front of the target's house and sent live communications to his handlers. He was nonetheless unable to carry out the attack and, after being stopped for a traffic violation and found in possession of the weapon, was arrested. Amirov and Omarov were also eventually arrested, and all three men were charged with various conspiracy charges.

A somewhat different dynamic is that of the August 12, 2022 assassination attempt of British-American author Salman Rushdie. On that day, Rushdie was speaking at the Chautauqua Institution in western New York State when an assailant rushed the stage and stabbed him fifteen times. Rushdie lost an eye but survived, and the event's moderator, who was also attacked, recovered from his injuries.

Rushdie has famously been the target of countless assassination plots since the 1988 publication of *“The Satanic Verses”* and the 1989 fatwa by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini ordering Muslims to kill the writer.^[53]

The Chautauqua attack differs from the other plots, not just because Rushdie is not an Iranian dissident (although he has been on the regime's hit list for decades), but also because of the absence of known direct links to the regime. The alleged perpetrator has been identified as Hadi Matar, the California-born son of a family from Southern Lebanon. In the wake of the attack, Matar's mother told media that her son, who had reportedly grown up reading both the Quran and the Bible, had changed after he visited Lebanon, becoming more withdrawn and religious and criticizing her “for not giving him a strict Muslim upbringing.”^[54] Police allegedly found images of Khomeini on Matar's social media accounts^[55] and on his email account, where reportedly Matar had a picture of Khamenei as his profile.^[56]

Matar has pleaded not guilty to state charges of attempted murder and assault and his trial has been postponed to September 2024.^[57] Additionally, in July 2024 he was charged in federal court with attempting to provide material support to Hezbollah, engaging in an act of terrorism transcending national boundaries; and providing material support to terrorists. “We allege that in attempting to murder Salman Rushdie in New York in 2022,” stated Attorney General Merrick B. Garland, “Hadi Matar committed an act of terrorism in the name of Hizballah, a designated terrorist organization aligned with the Iranian regime.” “The defendant attempted to carry out a fatwa endorsed by Hizballah that called for the death of Salman Rushdie — a fatwa issued in 1989 by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini,” added FBI Director Christopher Wray.^[58]

Targeting US officials

Iran's lethal plots on US soil have not been limited to targeting regime critics, as they have sought to assassinate both foreign and domestic officials. The 2011 plot to kill the then-Saudi Ambassador to the US Adel al-Jubeir is a key example. In 2011, the longstanding rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia boiled over varying issues, including the two governments taking opposite sides with the eruption of the Syrian war. It is against this backdrop that Mansour Arbabsiar, a naturalized US citizen of Iranian background, began to conspire with members of the Los Zetas Mexican drug cartel to assassinate Ambassador al-Jubeir by planting a bomb in a Washington, D.C. restaurant.^[59] Between May and July 2011, Arbabsiar traveled to Mexico to arrange the details, unaware that his Los Zetas contact was also a DEA informant. During these meetings, Arbabsiar made it clear that the plot should have proceeded even if innocent bystanders were harmed.^[60] In August 2011, he paid \$100,000 to an undercover FBI account as a down payment for the assassination, with the remaining \$1.5 million to be paid after the job was completed.^[61] Arbabsiar was arrested by federal agents during a layover at JFK International Airport in New York. He later confessed that his cousin, a senior member of the IRGC-QF, directed him to plan the assassination.^[62] According to the Department of Justice, "he was recruited, funded and directed by men he understood to be senior officials in Iran's Qods Force."^[63]

Iran's plots on US soil have evolved and escalated since 2011 for a variety of reasons. Between 2018 and 2020, the US government took several actions the Iranian regime considered highly adversarial. US officials led a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran,

which included withdrawing from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), imposing tougher sanctions, designating the IRGC as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in April 2019, and implementing diplomatic isolation in addition to some other actions aimed at curbing the Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missile development, and regional influence.^[64]

Then in January 2020, the Trump Administration executed a drone strike that killed IRGC-QF General Qassem Soleimani.^[65] Since Soleimani's death, the Islamic Republic has repeated the desire to avenge him. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has vowed "harsh retaliation," while Iranian President Hassan Rouhani promised his country would "take revenge."^[66] This desire to avenge Soleimani's death led to a set of lethal plots against former Trump Administration officials.

While the US government has publicly stated it is aware of multiple plots against US officials,^[67] many details remain undisclosed. One that has been revealed targeted Trump's former National Security Advisor, John Bolton, who held the position from 2018 to 2019. In 2021, IRGC member Shahram Poursafi, an Iranian citizen also known as Mehdi Rezavi, initiated a plan to kill Bolton in or around Washington, DC.^[68] Poursafi was allegedly acting at the behest of the IRGC and identified a potential co-conspirator within the US whom he tasked with conducting surveillance activities and planning the attack on Bolton.^[69] Unbeknownst to Poursafi, the person he was conspiring with was a government source. Poursafi ultimately agreed to pay \$300,000 for Bolton's death and emphasized the urgency of the action.

During its investigation, the FBI found images of Poursafi in an Iranian military uniform, wearing IRGC patches, with a poster of Soleimani in the background. In August 2022, the Department of

Justice announced Poursafi had been charged with various crimes relating to the murder-for-hire plot. Poursafi remains at large and is believed to be in Iran.^[70]



Figure 3: Poursafi's social media accounts, using the same photograph, which the FBI used to prove Poursafi's involvement.^[71]



Figure 4: Image of Poursafi with a uniform, patch on his arm and posters of Iran and Soleimani in the background.^[72]

In addition to Iran's efforts to target John Bolton, the investigation into Poursafi revealed the IRGC had a second target. While plotting against Bolton, in fact, Poursafi told the government source he had a second job that would pay \$1 million.^[73] Sources close to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo revealed he was on Poursafi's hit list and Pompeo has lived under strict protection ever since.^[74] The nature of the threat against Pompeo was confirmed by the decision by Secretary of State Anthony Blinken to extend Pompeo's protection due to "a serious and credible threat from a foreign power or agent of a foreign power arising from duties performed by former Secretary Pompeo while employed by the department."^[75] Additional Trump administration officials, such as former National Security Adviser Robert O'Brien, former Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, General Kenneth Frank McKenzie, and Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook, were assigned security details following threats from Iran.^[76]

Poursafi is not the only Iranian actor who is wanted in connection with plots against US officials. In March 2024, the FBI announced it was seeking information on Majed Dastjani Farhani for involvement in plots against unnamed US officials.^[77] The announcement stated Farhani is wanted for his “recruitment of individuals for various operations in the United States, to include lethal targeting of current and former United States Government officials as revenge for the killing of IRGC-QF Commander Qasem Soleimani.”^[78] Although specific details of his activities are not public, Farhani is believed to be acting on behalf of MOIS.^[79]



Figure 5: FBI Most Wanted: Shahram Poursafi.^[80]

A substantial development in Iran’s efforts to attack US officials on US soil came in July 2024, when information emerged that US authorities had knowledge of Iran planning to assassinate President Trump himself.^[81] Then on August 6, 2024, the US Department of Justice published a press release about the arrest of Asif Raza Merchant, a Pakistani national with ties to Iran. “For years, the Justice Department has been working aggressively to counter Iran’s brazen and unrelenting efforts to retaliate against American public officials for the killing of Iranian General Soleimani,” said Attorney General

Merrick B. Garland. “The Justice Department will spare no resource to disrupt and hold accountable those who would seek to carry out Iran’s lethal plotting against American citizens, and will not tolerate attempts by an authoritarian regime to target American public officials and endanger America’s national security.”^[82]

“Working on behalf of others overseas, Merchant planned the murder of U.S. Government officials on American soil,” said U.S. Attorney Breon Peace for the Eastern District of New York. “This prosecution demonstrates that this Office and the entire Department of Justice will take swift and decisive action to protect our nation’s security, our government officials and our citizens from foreign threats.” Of note, the press release revealed Merchant was not only interested in plotting lethal operations, but also sought involvement with other schemes consistent with the themes of this report, particularly procurement and propaganda activity. “Merchant” states the release, “explained that his plot involved multiple criminal schemes: (1) stealing documents or USB drives from a target’s home; (2) planning a protest; and (3) killing a politician or government official.”

Iran’s Cyber Operations

Although not necessarily lethal, cyber operations are attacks that can lead to significant damage and destruction to individuals, businesses, and critical infrastructure, and can even lead to death. Therefore, Iran’s cyber operations will be addressed in this chapter.

Over the last decade, Iran has experienced rapid development in its cyber operations, particularly within the IRGC and the MOIS. This infrastructural improvement primarily started as

an effort to ensure domestic security and mitigate potential dissidents during the presidential elections in 2009 who were part of what became known as the “Green Revolution.”^[83] Moreover, the alleged 2010 cyberattack on Iranian nuclear facilities, referred to as Stuxnet, exposed Iran’s vulnerability to cyber warfare. These events led Iran to intensify its focus on technological development and cyber warfare capabilities. In response to the Stuxnet attack, Iran executed the Shamoon virus attack on Saudi state-owned oil company Aramco, which resulted in the infection of over 30,000 computers and caused substantial disruption.^[84] In 2014, Iran was also implicated in a cyberattack on Sheldon Adelson’s Las Vegas Sands Corporation.^[85] In 2019, tensions surged as the U.S. Cyber Command launched a retaliatory cyber operation against Iran’s missile systems. This retaliation followed Iranian attacks on commercial shipping and the downing of a U.S. drone, highlighting the escalating cyber warfare dynamics between the two nations.^[86]

The FBI and the US intelligence community have expressed concerns about Iran having capabilities within the cyber domain to target US public and private infrastructure.^[87] In 2023, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence stated that “Iran’s growing expertise and willingness to conduct aggressive cyber operations make it a major threat to the security of U.S. and allied networks and data. Iran’s opportunistic approach to cyber-attacks makes critical infrastructure owners in the United States susceptible to being targeted.”^[88]

In February 2024, the US Government sanctioned leaders of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Cyber Electronic Command (IRGC-CEC) “for a series of malicious cyber activities against critical infrastructure in the United States and other countries.”^[89] The following April, the US Department of State

sanctioned two Iranian companies and four individuals linked to the IRGC-CEC for targeting “more than a dozen U.S. companies and government entities through cyber operations.”^[90]

Procurement

The Iranian regime wants American-made products, including high-tech equipment, software, and other sensitive goods, to enhance its military, technological, and telecommunications systems and capabilities. Iran also seeks financial support from individuals and entities outside of Iran, but the multitude of US sanctions and laws that have been enacted over the years complicates these efforts significantly. However, there is seemingly no end to Iranian-linked individuals and networks who seek to violate those sanctions and laws to give the regime what it wants. Over the last few years, in fact, scores of both US citizens and foreign nationals have been indicted in the US for crimes involving smuggling of American-made goods and providing financial support to Iran.

In many cases, the smuggled sensitive goods and technology are subject to national security controls by the US Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security.^[91] The US government sanctions individuals, networks, and companies providing material support to the Iranian regime, relying heavily on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)^[92] of 1977 and Executive Order No. 12959,^[93] enacted in 1995. IEEPA gives the President broad authority to regulate economic transactions after a declaration of national emergency.^[94] While primarily used against state actors, IEEPA has been increasingly used to target non-state individuals and networks who engage in illicit activities. The first use of IEEPA was in 1979, when President Jimmy Carter invoked the law in response to the Iranian hostage crisis. Successive presidents have renewed this emergency for over forty years, making it the longest emergency declared under IEEPA.^[95]

Another legal framework used to sanction individuals or networks supporting Iran materially is Executive Order No. 12959, enacted by President Bill Clinton. This order prohibits specific economic activities with Iran, including the importation or financing of Iranian goods or services into the US, the re-exportation of US goods or technology to Iran, and any investment by a US person in Iran or Iranian-controlled property.^[96] Without proper licensing, these activities are illegal for both US citizens and foreign nationals. Consequently, cases involving Iranian-linked individuals smuggling American goods and technology to Iran are prosecuted using these legal frameworks.

In recent years, the US government has charged and prosecuted several individuals for illegally providing goods and support to Iran. These individuals and groups used various tactics to smuggle goods and money including front companies, intermediaries, and exceeding the boundaries of their OFAC licenses.

Examples of these activities abound, even just in recent months. In January 2024, a group of Chinese nationals was charged with smuggling US-origin electronic components intended for the IRGC and the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics (MODAFL).^[97] The defendants used front companies in China to transport the electronics, while also concealing their destination.^[98] The components the defendants were aiming to smuggle could have been used to produce unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and ballistic missile systems. The conspiracy involved falsifying export information to bypass US laws prohibiting such exports.^[99]

In February 2024, Iranian citizens Abolfazi Bazzazi and Mohammad Resa Bazzazi were indicted for exporting US goods and technology to Iran without the required OFAC licenses. The defendants aimed to obtain sensitive commercial and military aircraft materials by concealing the goods' destination through European intermediaries.^[100] The smuggled goods were sanctioned technologies that could directly benefit the Iranian government, the IRGC and MODAFIL.

Similarly, in August 2024, Jeffrey Chance Nader, a US and Iranian citizen, was arrested for procuring military aircraft components on behalf of Iran.^[101] He was accused of conspiring to export to Iran almost three dozen aircraft materials, including some for the F-4 jet.^[102] The FBI Assistant Director in Charge David Sundberg said: "These violations not only undermine the impact of U.S. sanctions but can also adversely affect national security. The FBI and our law enforcement partners at the Department of Commerce will continue to identify and disrupt those who seek to violate U.S. law and steal our technology on behalf of hostile nations."^[103]

Individuals also seek to support the Iranian regime with money, which is a violation of IEEPA. Iran has used couriers to collect cash in the US, conceal it, and hand deliver to Iranian officials. One example of this activity occurred in 2018 and 2019. Muzzamil Zaidi and Asim Naqvi (Houston-based US citizens from Pakistan), along with Pakistani national Ali Chawla (in Iran) collected khums, a religious tax, from individuals in the United States.^[104] Zaidi carried the money out of the U.S. in amounts under \$10,000 to avoid Customs reporting requirements and provided it to Iranian officials.^[105] Zaidi and Naqvi were arrested in 2020, and federal court proceedings revealed Zaidi was not only involved in Iran's

procurement activities, but was also involved with Iran's propaganda/influence campaign and had connections with IRGC-QF. Specifically, after Zaidi attended university in the Houston area, he traveled to Iran to study at Al Mustafa International University (MIU) in 2015. While in Iran and attending MIU, Zaidi met with representatives of the Iranian Supreme Leader, traveled on a military plane to Iranian military bases in Syria run by the IRGC-QF, and was the Master of Ceremonies at an event commemorating the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution that was attended by one of the Supreme Leader's Ayatollahs, and where the audience chanted, "Death to America."^[106] On May 1, 2024, Zaidi and Naqvi pled guilty to violating the IEEPA.^[107]

It should be noted that Zaidi had also been a speaker at an event by the Texas-based Rise Against Oppression (RAO), a self-described a "collective of Muslim grassroots activists" which routinely glorifies the Iranian regime.^[108] Since October 2023, RAO has engaged in multiple activities on Texan college campuses, at times coordinating with local chapters of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). RAO arguably constitutes an example of the dynamic highlighted in July 2024 by the Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, when she warned that "Iranian government actors have sought to opportunistically take advantage of ongoing protests regarding the war in Gaza, using a playbook we've seen other actors use over the years. We have observed actors tied to Iran's government posing as activists online, seeking to encourage protests, and even providing financial support to protesters."^[109]

While many cases involve recent actions, at least one unsealed federal criminal complaint revealed a two-decade-long scheme.^[110] In March 2021, ten Iranian nationals were charged with evading US sanctions against

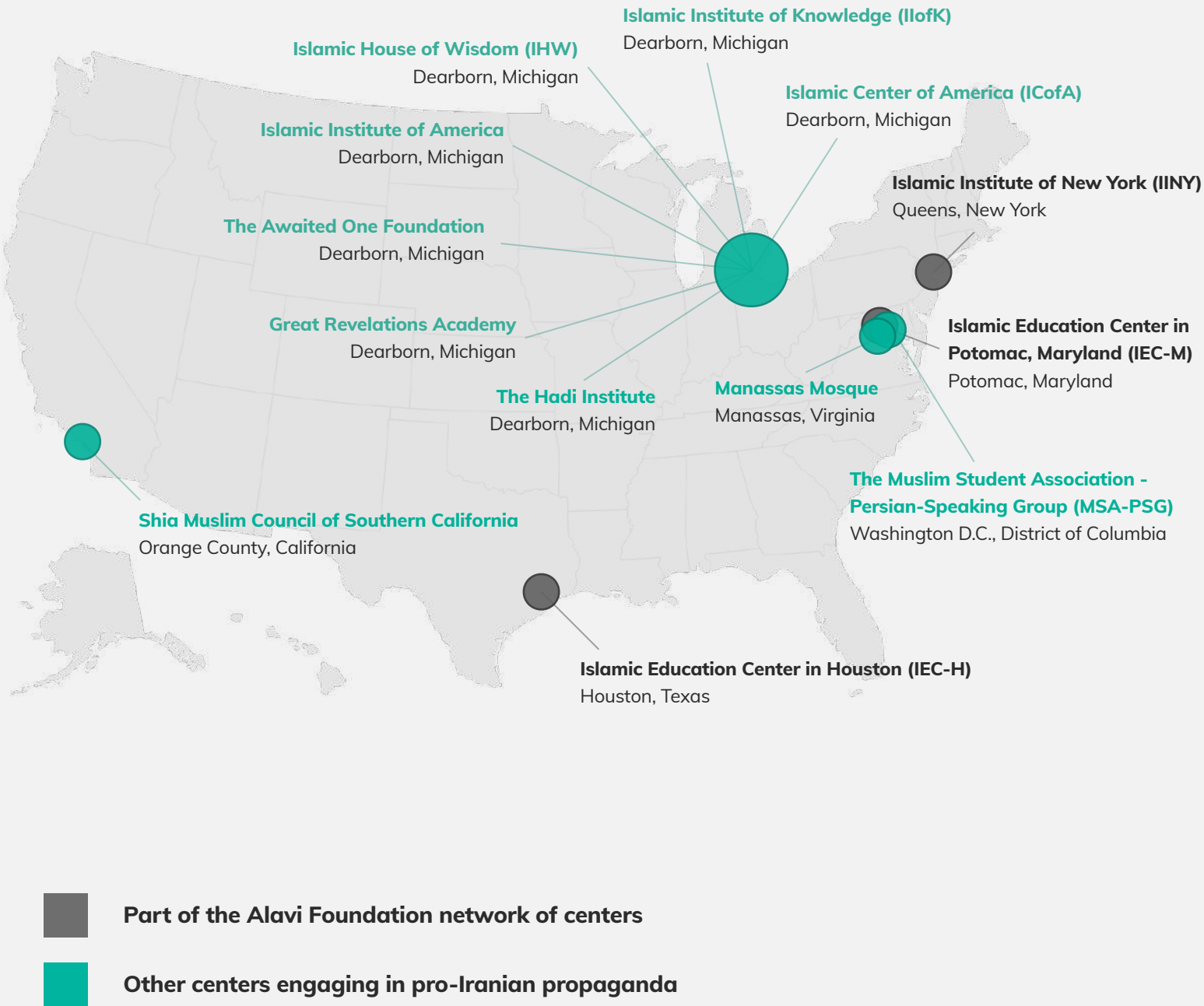
Iran, for almost twenty years, disguising more than \$300 million dollars in transactions, “including the purchase of two \$25 million oil tankers – on Iran’s behalf through front companies.”^[111] The defendants used front companies and exchange houses in Iran, Canada, the UAE, and Hong Kong. They facilitated the transfer of US dollars for the Islamic Republic of Iran through various US correspondent bank accounts, being fully aware of the optimal methods on how to effectively disguise the money transfers.^[112]

Another scheme emerged in February 2024, when Behnam Shahriyari and Morteza Rostam Ghasemi were alleged to have sold Iranian crude oil on the black market to entities in China, Russia, and Syria.^[113] The indictment asserts that Shahriyari and Ghasemi creatively manipulated ship transponder data and performed ship-to-ship transfers to obscure the oil’s origin and brazenly used the U.S. banking system to pay salaries and fees, facilitating the illegal exportation of funds and services.

These cases demonstrate Iran’s potential efforts to wield influence inside the United States and highlight its ability to obtain American-made goods and technology. These sorts of activities pose a significant risk to US national security, as the smuggled goods could directly benefit Iran’s military capabilities. Moreover, there is the possibility that US-based networks used for procurement efforts could also engage in violent activities, and therefore become a direct threat to the homeland.

Propaganda

Map 1: Mapping of the most active entities in the dissemination of pro-Iranian propaganda in the United States.



In addition to plotting assassinations and establishing procurement and financial activities, the Iranian regime and actors linked to it use US soil for a third typology of activity: the dissemination of their propaganda. Since the heyday of the Islamic Republic, Islamic centers, educational centers and influential individuals pushing narratives in open support of or closely aligned with the regime have been operating in various parts of the United States. They do not constitute a unified body, but rather are a kaleidoscope of actors whose degrees of connectivity with the Iranian regime vary, and are at times difficult to assess.

This section, therefore, does not aim to provide a comprehensive overview of all US-based individuals and entities that in various ways support the Iranian regime. Rather, it maps out some of those who have more openly and consistently carried out propaganda and educational activities aligned with the Iranian regime's worldview and/or have some connectivity to Iranian governmental apparatuses.

It should be noted that, although the US has designated Iran a state supporter of terrorism and, consequently, has imposed various sanctions against it, it is not inherently illegal for organizations or individuals within the US to have some degree of connection to the country. By the same token, constitutional protections allow, within the parameters set by the Supreme Court, for the espousing and the promotion of views supporting the Iranian regime and its proxies.

Alavi Foundation

The Alavi Foundation is arguably the most prolific actor in the spread of Iranian-regime influence in the United States. Alavi operates as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in New York.^[114] Alavi's stated mission is to support organizations and universities throughout the US by providing grants, no-interest loans, and donations to fund numerous initiatives such as the purchase of land, student scholarships, and the expansion of Persian and Islamic studies in the US.^[115] Additionally, it owns four properties in the US ^[116] that it leases for \$1 a year to Muslim community organizations to house mosques, community centers, schools, and health clinics. It also owns an office building at 650 Fifth Avenue in New York, NY, that it leases to commercial tenants, thus generating income.^[117]

Alavi was originally founded in 1973 by the Shah of Iran under the name, the Pahlavi Foundation.^[118] Following the Iranian Revolution, the Pahlavi Foundation was expropriated by the Bonyad Mostazafan,^[119] and renamed "the Mostazafan Foundation of New York" in 1980.^[120] It operated under the Mostazafan moniker until 1992, when it was renamed the "Alavi Foundation"—its current name.^[121] The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Department of the Treasury designated Bonyad Mostazafan and its president on November 18, 2020, for their actions on behalf of the Iranian regime.^[122]

Serious allegations that Alavi has acted on behalf of the Iranian regime have swirled since 2008.^[123] On December 17, 2008, the Treasury

^[120] Additionally, Bonyad Mostazafan, also known as the Islamic Revolution Mostazafan Foundation, was added on November 18, 2020 to the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) list maintained by the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control. For further information see: "Treasury Targets Vast Supreme Leader Patronage Network and Iran's Minister of Intelligence." US Department of the Treasury Press Release. November 18, 2020. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm1185#:~:text=Bonyad Mostazafan is being designated,the Supreme Leader of Iran>

TEXTBOX 2

Bonyad Mostazafan

On November 18, 2020, OFAC designated Bonyad Mostazafan as a “key patronage network for the Supreme Leader of Iran.” Within the designation, the US Department of Treasury noted that Bonyad Mostazafan purported to be a charitable organization, but instead was “an immense conglomerate” and “its holdings are expropriated from the Iranian people and are used by the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to enrich his office, reward his political allies, and persecute the regime’s enemies.” In 2017, Bonyad Mostazafan’s managers worked for Ebrahim Raisi’s presidential campaign, and its properties had been used by the IRGC. Concurrently, OFAC designated Bonyad’s then President, Parviz Fattah, a former IRGC officer who maintained ties to the Supreme Leader and “senior IRGC-QF officials.”

Department announced it designated two Iranian entities under Executive Order 13382: “ASSA CORP., a front company created and controlled by Iran’s Bank Melli and domiciled in New York, and its parent company ASSA Co. LTD., located in the Channel Islands.” At the time, ASSA co-owned 650 Fifth Avenue with Alavi. Concurrently, the Department of Justice filed a civil forfeiture complaint in the Southern District of New York (S.D.N.Y.) which sought the forfeiture all of ASSA’s interest in the building at 650 Fifth Avenue, New York.^[124]

Two days later, the United States Attorney’s Office (USAO) in the S.D.N.Y. began to illustrate Iran’s interest in the building, and involvement with ASSA and Alavi, in a press release. Alavi (under its original name Pahlavi) constructed the building at 650 Fifth Avenue, New York in the 1970s and its construction was financed by a significant loan from Iranian-owned Bank Melli.^[125] In 1989, Alavi created 650 Fifth Avenue Company to disguise Iranian-owned Bank Melli’s interest in the property via ASSA. In its December 2008 media statement, the USAO in the S.D.N.Y. explained as follows:

Specifically, the Alavi Foundation transferred 35% of 650 Fifth Avenue Company to Assa Corporation, an entity wholly owned by Assa Company Limited; Assa Company Limited... was and has since been wholly owned by Iranian citizens who represent the interests of Bank Melli. In conjunction with the transfer of the 35% interest in 650 Fifth Avenue to Assa Corporation, Bank Melli cancelled its loan on the Building. Today, the Alavi Foundation owns 60% of 650 Fifth Avenue Company and Bank Melli owns 40% of 650 Fifth Avenue Company, through Assa Corporation and Assa Company Limited.^[126]

On the same day, the Department of Justice announced the arrest of Alavi’s president, Farshid Jahedi, for destroying documents relating to the government’s investigation of Alavi, ASSA and Bank Melli after being served with a Grand Jury subpoena requiring their production.^[127] While under surveillance, Jahedi was observed destroying and discarding relevant documents. Jahedi later pled guilty to two counts of obstruction of justice for those actions and was sentenced to three months in prison.^[128]

In 2009, the USAO in the S.D.N.Y. announced it had amended the civil forfeiture complaint against ASSA to include Alavi for its role in the above scheme and its provision of services to the Government of Iran.^[129] The US government also sought the forfeiture of other Alavi assets, including bank accounts and “real properties owned by the Alavi Foundation in New York, Maryland, Virginia, Texas and California.”^[130] The statement included, in part, the following allegations:

The Alavi Foundation has been providing numerous services to the Iranian government, including managing the Building for the Iranian government, running a charitable organization for the Iranian Government, and transferring funds from 650 Fifth Avenue Company to Bank Melli.

After reiterating the scheme between Alavi and ASSA to disguise Bank Melli’s interest in the Manhattan building, the statement provided additional, extensive details about Iranian involvement. The USAO stated that the scheme was “discussed and approved by high-level Iranian government officials.” In conclusion, the USAO stated, “the Alavi Foundation has effectively been a front for the Government of Iran. For two decades, the Alavi Foundation’s affairs have been directed by Iranian officials, including Iranian ambassadors to the United Nations, in violation of a series of American laws.”^[131]

Litigation of the forfeiture complaint against Alavi has been extensive and complex, including a five-week jury trial in the S.D.N.Y. in 2017. The jury found Alavi violated the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) and committed money laundering, and that the Manhattan building and Alavi’s share in the company were forfeitable. Further, “the jury also found certain portions of properties

owned by Alavi in Queens, New York; Houston, Texas; Carmichael, California; and Rockville, Maryland partially forfeitable to the United States as proceeds of IEEPA violations...”^[132] The USAO commented, “For over a decade, hiding in plain sight, this 36-story Manhattan office tower secretly served as a front for the Iranian government and as a gateway for millions of dollars to be funneled to Iran in clear violation of U.S. sanctions laws.”^[133]

The US government’s victory in this matter was short-lived. The judgment was overturned by the appellate court due to procedural errors in the district court’s rulings.^[134] Since then, various aspects of the case against Alavi have been ruled upon, upheld, overturned, and some remanded to the district court where the case is still pending.

Despite the original verdict’s reversal, Alavi’s connection to the Iranian state is clear and concerning, especially considering the broad span of Alavi’s activities in the fields of education and religion, where the Iranian regime can subtly but powerfully seed its influence, agendas, and extremist rhetoric.^[135] Alavi runs a financial aid program professedly aimed at helping Islamic organizations; however, its ties to Iran and the ideologies and actions of many of its associates indicate that it serves as part of the Iranian regime’s American propaganda and influence campaign. The beneficiaries of this program include, according to Alavi itself, more than 35 organizations throughout the US,^[136] and the aforementioned four properties located in New York, Maryland, Texas and California.

Islamic Institute of New York

The Islamic Institute of New York (IINY) is a NY-based non-profit organization “which offers religious and cultural services to Muslim communities in New York and the Tri-State area.”^[137] It has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1995.^[138] It occupies a 36,000 square foot, multi-story building that was constructed by Alavi on Queens Boulevard, ^[139] in Queens, New York, along with the Imam Ali Mosque and Al Razi School,^[140] a pre-K- 12 school that has received over a million dollars from Alavi and also reportedly receives funding from the State of New York’s Department of Education.^[141]

The IINY is one of the four properties the government sought forfeiture of in the civil action against Alavi discussed at length herein. ^[142] The Alavi Foundation has provided over \$1.6 million to IINY over the years, in addition to “the millions spent on maintaining and upgrading the facility.”^[143] The IINY website at english.iiny.org

is no longer operable, but a review of some archived pages revealed that the IINY and Imam Ali mosque have held events in line with Tehran’s agenda, such as commemorating the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution^[144] and Quds day^[145] – a day of protest against Israel declared by Khomeini in 1979 and commemorated the last Friday of every Ramadan.

One additional element that establishes links between the IINY and the Iranian regime is that Iranian officials such as Mohammad Khazaei, Iranian Ambassador to the United Nations between 2007-2014, have regularly spoken at IINY events.^[146] In fact, during his time in the US, Khazaei used IINY’s facilities to periodically meet with Alavi’s president at the time, Farshid Jahedi. After those meetings, Jahedi then generally met with Alavi’s board.^[147] As described previously, Jahedi pled guilty and was later sentenced to three months in prison for destroying documents concerning the Alavi’s relationship with Bank Melli.^[148]

Figure 6: Mohammad Khazaei, former Iranian ambassador to the United Nations, at the 35th Anniversary of the Islamic Revolution of Iran organized at the Islamic Institute of New York (2014). ^[149]



Islamic Education Center in Potomac, Maryland (IEC-M)

The Islamic Education Center in Potomac, Maryland (IEC-M)^[150] has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1988.^[151] It was originally established in 1981 and “run directly by the Alavi Foundation.”^[152] In 1998, the IEC-M evolved into what appeared to be a more self-sufficient non-profit organization, operating on Alavi Foundation-owned property, “to promote Islam through culture and belief.”^[153] The IEC-M, and the Muslim Community School (MCS)/Alim School, which educates children from pre-K through 12th grade and shares the property with IEC-M, have received over \$3.6 million from Alavi.^[154]

IEC-M did, at one time, attempt to distance itself from Alavi, at least on paper. In the months after the 2017 jury verdict against Alavi Foundation, wherein IEC-M’s building was found to be partially forfeitable, IEC-M filed a lawsuit asserting it - and not Alavi - should have ownership of the building.^[155] Those proceedings were ultimately stayed after the appellate court reversed the jury verdict in the Alavi Foundation civil forfeiture litigation.

However, interesting facts arose during the pendency of the case between IEC-M and Alavi. For example, IEC-M’s complaint in Maryland state court, later removed to federal court, cited an affidavit previously introduced in the S.D.N.Y. *In re 650 Fifth Avenue and Related Properties* case by Manouchehr Shafie, the first president of the Mostazafan Foundation.^[156] In the affidavit, he attempted to explain why the IEC-M property should belong to IEC-M and not Alavi,^[157] however, he seemed to reveal additional facts linking IEC-M to the Iranian regime. Shafie explained that in the early 1980s, while he was president of the Mostazafan Foundation, Mostazafan advanced

funds to the Maryland community so they could purchase land and build the IEC-M facility because the funds they needed and were expecting from the sale of land in Iran, had not yet been released to them.^[158] During this time, the IEC-M was trying to secure funds for the purchase of the property by selling a “valuable property in Teheran” that belonged to a “long time community member.”^[159] That long time community member was Ayatollah Mehdi Haeri Yazdi.^[160] Recent FOIA disclosures provide insight into Yazdi, who had been appointed Khomeini’s special representative in the Iranian Embassy in Washington in 1979.^[161] Furthermore, Yazdi is the first son of Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi, one of Khomeini’s mentors and founder of the Islamic Seminary of Qom.^[162] According to the affidavit, Mostazafan Foundation bought the property for the IEC-M for \$1.5 million and later received \$2 million from the sale of Yazdi’s Tehran property.^[163] However, Shafie claimed the Mostazafan Foundation never disclosed the receipt of these funds to the IEC-M community. ^[164]

One of the IEC-M’s founders, Bahram Abolfazl Nahidian, was instrumental in obtaining funding for the IEC-M. ^[165] Nahidian (on whom more below), who currently serves as the leading imam at the Manassas Mosque (discussed at length in the section below), has a long-documented history of expressing support for the Iranian regime and its proxy organizations and was identified by the *Washington Post* as one of the most prominent leaders of American Khomeinism in the early 80s. ^[166]

These historical ties are still very much present today. IEC-M’s current religious director and imam is Sheikh Ahmad Bahraini,^[167] who is also a member of the consultative body of the Council of Shia Muslim Scholars of North America.^[168] Before migrating to the US, Bahraini was the “head of the Supreme Leader’s representative body at Shahid

Beheshti University.”^[169] Bahraini has participated in events organized by Iranian officials in Washington D.C., such as commemorating the 1979 Revolution, which he described as “the driving force behind all positive movements in many communities around the world,” or celebrating Khomeini’s legacy, whom Bahraini describes as “a mystical personality, a divine and powerful figure [...] that feared nothing, neither political hardships nor war.”^[170]

Furthermore, beyond the ideological affiliations of past or present leaders of the center, the IEC-M engages in celebrations such as “Sacred Defense Week,”^[171] during which it commemorates Khomeini’s strategic military thinking and guidance during the first week of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. Further evidence of IEC-M’s support for the regime emerged in the recent condolences they expressed following the deaths of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a May 2024 helicopter accident.^[172]

IEC-M social media accounts also share videos from Fars News Agency,^[173] which is “closely affiliated with the IRGC.”^[174] Exemplifying this relationship are posts from IEC-M’s Facebook page of different videos of Iran’s top preachers, such as Hujjat al-Islam Gholamreza Qasemian,^[175] a high ranked regime scholar and head of Iran’s Parliamentary Documentation Center.^[176]

Concerns over IEC-M’s ties to Iran were reiterated by members of Congress in a July 2023 letter to the Department of Justice calling it “part of a network of regime-sponsored mosques acting as agents for a foreign adversary.”^[177]

Islamic Education Center in Houston (IEC-H)

Another center tied to the Alavi Foundation is the Islamic Education Center in Houston, Texas (IEC-H). IEC-H is the trade name of the Anjuman-e-Haideri Isna Ashri Shia Muslim Association of Greater Houston (AEH), a 501(c)

Figure 7: Screenshot from a video from Fars News Agency published by IEC-M, portraying IRGC Commander Mehdi Barki as one of the greatest Iranian war heroes. ^[178]



(3) non-profit organization that self-identifies as “a center for imparting knowledge about Islam and promoting Islamic values” and operates alongside its Al Hadi School for Accelerative Learning.^[179] It has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1985.^[180] Its facility is one of the four properties targeted in the Alavi civil forfeiture action. Much like the IINY and IEC-M, the IEC-H has also benefitted substantially from the Alavi Foundation,^[181] as it and the Al-Hadi School have received \$800,000 from the Alavi Foundation, in addition to millions spent on facility maintenance and renovations.^[182]

The positions held by Ali Akbar Badiei, IEC-H’s former director,^[183] are indicative of the close relations between the center and the Iranian regime. After serving as IEC-H director, Badiei

has been both the General Director for Ahlul Bayt World Assembly for Europe and America^[184] and the Director General of its Legal Department.^[185] The Ahlul Bayt World Assembly, as Textbox 4 explains, is one of the most important entities created by the Iranian regime to spread its soft power internationally. After leaving the United States, Badiei also began working at Al-Mustafa International University, a US-designated entity dedicated to spreading the Iranian regime’s ideology around the world (for al Mustafa, see Textbox 3).^[186]

Other preachers who have actively contributed to the center, such as its former leading imam, Gholam Hurr Shabbiri, or the Kentucky-born preacher Hamza Sodagar (on which more below, especially in the subsection on Individual Activists/Preachers), constitute quintessential

Figure 8: Screenshot from a video from the yearly Imam Khomeini conference held at the IEC-H in 2014 during a lecture by Ali Akbar Badiei, then director of the center. ^[187]



^[183] Before serving as IEC-H director, Badiei also worked as Imam at the pro-Iranian regime Islamic Center of Manchester (England). For further context see: “About the Manchester Islamic Center.” *Manchester Islamic Centre*. Accessed May 9, 2024. <https://micuk.uk/en/about-us/>

examples of ideological ambassadors for the Iranian regime. Shabbiri has echoed Iran's anti-Israel rhetoric in sermons at the IEC-H, claiming Israel "is going to be washed from the map" and promising the "the flag of Islam is going to be the flag of victory."^[188] Tellingly, a letter about Iranian influence issued by various members of Congress to the Department of Justice stated that "according to the website of Maulana Shabbiri's current employer," Shabbiri was "directly appointed by the office of the [Iranian] Supreme Leader."^[189]

Some of the events organized by the IEC-H also clearly reveal its pro-regime sympathies. The center organizes yearly celebrations commemorating the anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution,^[190] convenes a yearly

symposium on the day of Khomeini's death,^[191] and commemorates Quds Day.^[192]

The center is also home to two youth groups, Al-Qasim and Ansar al-Hujjah,^[193] which actively promote the regime's ideology by hosting aligned preachers, such as Usama Abdulghani (on which more below) and Amin Rastani (on which more below), praising Revolution icons,^[194] and commemorating regime promoted events.^[195] As recently as May 2024, discussing the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Abdulghani praised him as "a true soldier of the Imam Khamenei."^[196]

One of the most notorious examples of this relationship is IEC-H's participation in the regime's campaign "Salam Farmandeh" with a

Figure 9: Screenshot from IEC-H website's 2024 Calendar



professional quality video clip.^[197] In the video, a large group of mainly young children and women appear singing the popular song promising Imam Mahdi ^[198] that they will tread on the path of the late IRGC-QF Commander General Qassem Soleimani.^[199]

its religious authority.^[201] The Muslim Congress regularly commemorates different milestones of the Iranian Revolution^[202] and the death of Khomeini especially,^[203] but also praises the legacy of contemporary figures, such as General Soleimani.^[204]

Figure 10: Screenshot from IEC-H website's 2024 Calendar



Equally noteworthy is IEC-H's organization of the Muslim Congress, a project launched in 2005^[200] aiming to spread the regime's views and build support for it among American Muslims, as well establishing itself as an alternative to the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA), which considers the more moderate Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani as

The Muslim Congress' annual gathering has featured lectures by preachers with a clearly marked pro-Iranian regime record such as Mohammad Al-Asi, Abdul Alim Musa and Hamza Sodagar.^[205] Mohammad Al-Asi's controversial views have been the topic of reporting for years. Al-Asi was interviewed in 2006 by Iranian media wherein he claimed the

^[197] Song in support for the Islamic Revolution and its leader, produced by Iranian artist Abuzar Rouhi and released in March 2022 after Ali Khamenei's Persian New Year speech on the national tv. Since its release clips with groups of children singing and performing have become popular as a sign of support of the regime.

^[198] Imam al-Mahdi is the twelfth and final Imam in Shia Islam, believed to be in occultation and destined to return as the savior of humanity. Shia Muslims hold that he will reappear to bring justice and peace to the world.

^[201] Formed in 2002, UMAA is a Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani leaning American Shia congregation that advocates for full participation in U.S. democracy and broader society. For further information see: <https://umaamerica.org/>

events of September 11, 2001 “were planned by the American administration, to be used as a pretext and justification to fight terrorism,” and in 2018 he spoke at an Al Quds Day celebration regarding Israel and stated: “The Zionist colonialist force in the Holy Land shall be dislodged. We prefer it be dislodged peacefully, but they don't prefer it that way. They're going to force us to dislodge it with every other means barring peace.”^[206] Similarly, the late Abdul Alim Musa has echoed the rhetoric that 9/11 was a “Zionist plot,” and in a 2021 sermon he condemned Israel, referred to the US government as “evil” and encouraged Muslims to “help us fight the against Zionists.”^[207]

The Muslim Congress annual gathering typically starts with a message by one of Iran's top religious figures, such as Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli^[208] during the latest edition.^[209] During his time as chairman of the Muslim Congress, former IEC-H Imam Gholam Hurr Shabbiri occasionally traveled to Iran to meet with religious authorities such as Ayatollah Mehdi Hadavi Tehrani, member of the Supreme Council of the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly.^[210]

Syed Abbas Ayleya (variant Sayyid Abbas Ayleya), a Pakistani-born, US-based Shia scholar^[211] is also reportedly a director of the Muslim Congress.^[212] According to the

Figure 11: Screenshot from a video from the yearly Islamic Revolution Anniversary held at the IEC-H in 2014 during a lecture by Gholam Hurr Shabbiri.^[213]



^[208] Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli was a member of the Assembly of Experts for Constitution, the constituent assembly in charge of ratifying the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. During the 80s he led different delegations of the government to the USSR. Later he acted as Prayer Leader in Qom, the largest center for Shia scholarship in the world.

referenced article, Ayleya spoke at a Muslim Congress event in 2020 wherein he praised the Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei while also stating, "there will be no Zionism" and "no Zionist regime after 20 years."^[214] Ayleya added that "We are guaranteed that Palestine will definitely be free." Ayleya has also preached

pro-Iranian regime rhetoric on the Iranian-owned Islamic Pulse media site, calling for all of the land of Palestine and Israel to be liberated from non-Muslims. His video featured speeches by the Iranian Supreme Leader and Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah.^[215]

Figure 12: Ayela's Presentation on Islamic Pulse Celebrating Al-Quds Day and Featuring Deceased Iranian Supreme Leader Khomeini.



Figure 13: Excerpt from Ayleya's Islamic Pulse Al Quds-Day Program with Crowds Chanting "Khamenei" (the current Iranian Supreme Leader) is the Leader

Ayleya's affiliation with Islamic Pulse is significant as Islamic Pulse is known to publish pro-regime rhetoric and has employed at least two individuals who have been indicted in federal court in recent years for provision of funds to the Iranian government in violation of IEEPA.^[216]

The potential impact of these IEC-H and Muslim Congress activities and sermons on the youth is concerning. Muslim Congress records reveal two Pakistani youths, Ali Danial Hemani and Mohammad Shayan Hemani, spoke at a Muslim Congress youth event in 2010.^[217] More than a decade later, Ali Danial Hemani was arrested on non-terrorism, criminal charges and in his detention hearing, his families' support for the Iranian regime was highlighted.^[218] Therein,

testimony revealed Ali Danial Hemani's brother, believed to be Mohamed Shayan Hemani, had traveled to Iran to attend a university that was designated as a terrorist organization,^[219] studying at a well-known Shia Muslim seminary in Iran, where allegedly around 100 other American Shia Muslims are enrolled. Testimony also revealed Ali Danial Hemani's family traveled to Iran in 2020 to mourn the death of Soleimani, and while there, Ali Danial Hemani's mother stated she wished her sons would become martyrs like Soleimani.^[220] The link between the Hemani family's ideologies and the Muslim Congress is not established, but enhances concerns over their involvement in the radicalization of the youth.

TEXTBOX 3

Al-Mustafa International University

Al-Mustafa International University (MIU) is an umbrella organization that coordinates seminaries, schools, and educational centers exclusively for non-Iranians, operating both inside and outside Iran. MIU was established in 2008 by integrating two older educational institutions –the International Center for Islamic Studies (ICIS) and the Organization for Overseas Seminaries and Schools (OOSS)– that were established shortly after the Iranian Revolution by clerical leaders of the Islamic Republic. Overseen by the Office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei through the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly, MIU trains non-Iranian students to propagate the Iranian version of Shia Islam, placing a special focus on Khomeini's concept of *velayat-e faqih*^[221] and to export the ideology of the Revolution.^[222]

Headquartered in the holy city of Qom, Iran, MIU is currently estimated to have more than 40,000 foreign students from 130 different nationalities enrolled.^[223] Other than teaching foreign nationals in Iran, MIU has also developed a network of more than 50 branches in different countries, with a special focus on its presence in Latin America, Asia and Africa.^[224]

^[221] *Velayat-e faqih*, that can be translated as "guardianship of the Islamic jurist," is a concept in Twelver Shia Islamic law which justifies the rule of the clergy over the state until the reappearance of the infallible Imam. For further context see: Aarabi, Kasra. "What Is Velayat-e Faqih?" *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*. March 20, 2019. Accessed May 20, 2024. <https://www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/what-velayat-e-faqih>

On December 8, 2020, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control designated MIU, pursuant to Executive Order 13224 (2001),^[225] for enabling "IRGC-QF intelligence operations by allowing its student body, which includes large numbers of foreign and American students, to serve as an international recruitment network."^[226] In fact, MIU's direct action targeting US citizens have been organized around two main objectives. On one hand, according to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, "the IRGC-QF uses Al-Mustafa University to develop student exchanges with foreign universities for the purposes of indoctrinating and recruiting foreign sources" from whom "IRGC-QF members sought to collect intelligence."^[227] On the other, and possibly more concerning in the medium and long term, MIU also serves as a comprehensive platform for recruiting, training and radicalizing individuals, some of which "have been sent to Syria to fight on behalf of IRGC-QF-led militias," namely with the U.S.-designated Fatemiyoun Division,^[228] within which multiple MIU students have been killed fighting.^[229] In 2022, Canada also designated MIU as an entity that spreads the Iranian regime's ideology abroad through its global branches.^[230]

Special candidates to be trained at MIU in Iran are usually evaluated and approached by recruiters, but the University also encourages students to submit applications. The criteria for admissions break with traditional academic conventions, giving special priority to polyglot profiles holding high-ranking scientific positions, and activists in religious, social, cultural and political arenas.^[231] According to MIU's admission policy, tuition appears to be free in most cases; additionally, the university also provides monthly stipends, free housing, home loans, health care and other benefits to facilitate the stay of those candidates meeting the criteria.^[232] After having received training, some of these candidates are then deployed back to their home countries to further propagate Iran's ideology.^[233]

Due to a combination of sanctions, the designation of MIU as a terrorist entity, and the nature of its activities, the extent of the university's engagement with US citizens remains unclear, but evidence exists to establish that it is happening. The case of Muzzamil Zaidi, a Houston-based US citizen from Pakistan, indicates there is certainly engagement. Zaidi, discussed herein for his involvement in illegally collecting and sending money to Iran in 2018 and 2019, left the United States to attend MIU in 2015. While in Iran and attending MIU, Zaidi met with representatives of the Iranian Supreme Leader, traveled on a military plane to Iranian military bases in Syria run by the IRGC-QF, and was the Master of Ceremonies at an event commemorating the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution that was attended by one of the Supreme Leader's Ayatollahs, and where the audience chanted, "Death to America."^[234] Further, the criminal case against Ali Danial Hemani, discussed herein, provides insight into another US-based individual of Pakistani descent leaving the US to attend a designated university, most likely MIU. Of even more concern is in the community petition in support of Hemani, which states that the brother is "studying at a famous and well-known Shi'a Muslim religious seminary in Qum, Iran (where close to 100 other American Shia Muslims are currently enrolled)" and says students who attend the school become religious preachers who return to teach at home in the US.

Additionally, to illustrate MIU's commitment to facilitating Iran's soft power campaign, it is worth noting that MIU's Islam Oriente Department, which has a specific focus on Latin America, possesses an annual budget of \$80 million. The absence of significant obstacles for MIU's operations in most Latin American countries facilitates the identification of its recruitment, training, and repatriation strategies for students. Upon returning to their respective countries, individuals that underwent this process are tasked with spearheading various projects –religious, social, political, and activist in nature– to advance the objectives of the regime's ideology and agenda.

TEXTBOX 4

Ahlul Bayt World Assembly

The Ahlul Bayt World Assembly (ABWA)^[235] was formally established in 1994 by Ali Khamenei as a successor of the World Assembly for the Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, founded in 1990 on the first anniversary of Khomeini's death. Khomeini believed that achieving a globally powerful and influential Iranian state required exporting the ideals of the Revolution to non-Iranian Shia and Sunni communities. ABWA was shaped by that vision, and the NGO-resembling institution has arguably become one of the main tools for spreading the Iranian regime's version of Shia Islam and supporting its agenda.^[236]

As part of the regime's diplomatic tools to expand its influence through networking, ABWA has established relationships not only with other religious entities, but also with academic institutions, civil rights organizations, charities, and welfare projects in numerous countries. Additionally, it operates offices and centers in about 90 countries^[237] and maintains a news aggregator that provides coverage of its activities in 27 languages^[238] to amplify the reach of its religious and cultural activities.

^[235] In Persian language [مجمع جهانی اهل البيت]. Also referred to as *Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly*. A clarification regarding the name of the institution is warranted. Despite differences in how Sunni and Shia Muslims interpret the term *Ahlul Bayt*, the Arabic construct broadly refers to the household of Prophet Muhammad. While all Muslims revere the Prophet's household, the Iranian religious and political establishment uses *Ahlul Bayt* as an expression to refer sympathizers of the revolution, whether Sunni or Shi'a communities outside of Iran. It was Ali Khamenei who was behind the word choice as he saw it a more neutral one upon which to build his narrative for the sympathizers of the Revolution. For further context see: Waez'zadeh Khorasani, Muhammad. "Summary of the Ahl-ul-bayt World Congress resolution." *Mishkāt*, 1990: Issue 27.

While both ABWA and al-Mustafa International University (MIU) are important tools to spread the regime's influence, it is worth highlighting their close relationship and the ways in which they complement each other. Not only do both institutions have common goals and ideological foundations, but they are also operationally linked to each other, sharing some key personnel and individuals on their boards of directors.^[239]

The stature of the individuals who have served as ABWA's Secretary General reflects the significant importance the regime places on the Assembly. ABWA's current Secretary General is Ayatollah Reza Ramezani, formerly head and director of the Islamic Center of Hamburg, Germany (2008-2017), and head of the Board of Scholars of the Union of Shia Centers in Germany (2009-2013).^[240] Before Ramezani, the position was held by Ayatollah Hassan Akhtari (2004-2019)^[241] who, prior to becoming ABWA's Secretary General, served as the Iranian ambassador to Syria – between 1986 and 1998, and again from 2005 until late 2007. During that time, Akhtari contributed to two important Iranian dossiers. In one, he played a key role in elevating the strategic relations between Iran and Syria, helping turn the latter into a vassal state of the former and in the other he worked closely with Ghazi Kanaan, the Syrian intelligence chief in Lebanon, to broker reconciliation talks between Amal and Hezbollah.^[242] These talks ultimately resulted in Hezbollah's rise to its current prominent position inside Lebanon and Akhtari is credited as one of the undisputed key architects of this development.^[243]

Given the sanctions imposed on the Iranian regime, ABWA does not operate openly in the United States, making it difficult to assess its relationships with other institutions and the extent of its penetration in the country. However, the activities of some especially important individuals in this report hint at the extent of its presence. Although imam Elahi (about which more below) is the only identifiable American member of ABWA's General Assembly,^[244] which "meets every four years to policy [sic] and review opportunities, threats and strategies for their activities,"^[245] there are other former IEC-H preachers who also have close links to the Assembly. While he was still part of the IEC-H, Imam Ghulam Hurr Shabbiri held meetings in Iran with Ayatollah Mehdi Hadavi Tehrani, member of the Supreme Council of the ABWA,^[246] and had other close contacts within the ABWA's Supreme Council on Pakistan related issues.^[247]

^[239] An example of this is Ali Akbar Badiei, former IEC-H director. After leaving his position as IEC-H director, Badiei was promoted to the positions of General Director for Europe and America and Director General of the Legal Department for the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly. Badiei has also served in MIU's international structures. See for context: Vidino, Lorenzo. "Italia-Iran, relazioni pericolose: il caso dell'Università di Palermo." *La Repubblica*, March 8, 2024. Accessed May 27, 2024. https://www.repubblica.it/commenti/2024/03/07/news/iran_italia_universita_al_mustafa_qom_palermo-422273249/

^[241] Ayatollah Hassan Akhtari also heads the Committee to Support the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People, dependent on the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Figure 14: Imam Elahi (in white, on the right) in a meeting of ABWA's General Assembly in Mashhad, Iran, 2015. [\[248\]](#)

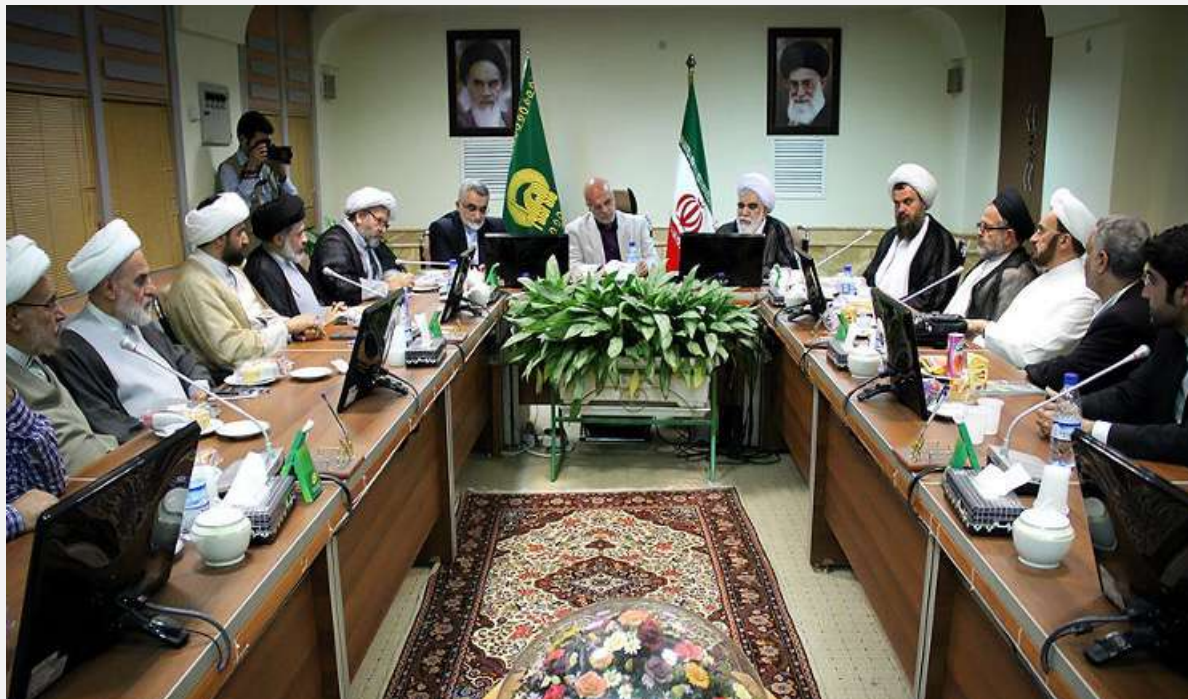


Figure 15: Imam Elahi (with a white turban, on the right) in a meeting with ABWA's Supreme Council member Ayatollah Hadavi Tehrani part of the organization committee of the 7th Summit of the General Assembly in 2022. [\[249\]](#)

However, the professional path followed by former IEC-H director Ali Akbar Badiei is the most elucidating of ABWA's penetration into the United States. Immediately after leaving his position as IEC-H director, Badiei was promoted to General Director for Europe and America^[250] and Director General of the Legal Department of the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly.^[251] In addition, he simultaneously started serving as an international liaison officer and distinguished professor for al-Mustafa International University.^[252]

A further indicator of ABWA's penetration in America is the fact that it organizes trips for academics from the US to meet with high-ranking officials of the Assembly and receive training at its premises in Qom.^[253] Also, ABWA's news aggregator regularly covers the most important activities of some of the centers discussed in this report, such as the Islamic Institute of America or Imam Elahi's House of Wisdom.^[254]

Furthermore, ABWA's activities north and south of the US border are noteworthy. Over the last several years ABWA's influence in Latin America has grown exponentially. The organization currently maintains Islamic centers or offices in sixteen Latin American countries and some of its board members take trips touring the region and participating in high-level meetings.^[255] As for Canada, the Islamic Shia Assembly of Canada exemplifies ABWA's penetration strategy in countries that impose restrictions on Iran (for more on it, see below).

The three aforementioned Alavi-related Educational Centers are only a few of the centers Alavi has funded over the years. Some of those will be addressed at length herein, like the Manassas Mosque and the Islamic House of Wisdom. Some of the other noteworthy institutions are the Qoba Foundation in Carmichael, California, which was the fourth referenced property involved in the litigation against Alavi in the S.D.N.Y.; the Islamic Education Center of Tampa, whose CEO is listed as Ghulam Shabbiri;^[256] the Islamic Center of Portland; and Ahlul Bayt Mosque in Brooklyn, NY. Alavi not only funds Islamic educational centers, but the evidence of its donations to numerous universities, including Harvard University, Columbia University,

Rutgers University, McGill University, Ohio State University, University of Michigan, University of Arizona, University of Virginia, University of Texas at Austin, University of Pennsylvania, University of California at Berkeley, University of Wisconsin, Portland State University, San Diego State, and Catholic University,^[257] raises the question about its attempted influence these campuses.

The Dearborn Hub

Many of the US-based Islamic centers that most unequivocally disseminate the ideology of the Iranian regime have no direct, overt ties with the Alavi Foundation. Several of them are

located in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit with one of the largest Muslim populations in the United States per capita,^[258] including a community of approximately 1,000 families of Iranian origin and the largest Lebanese American population in the country.^[259]

Islamic Center of America

Dearborn's Islamic Center of America (ICofA),^[260] currently the largest mosque in North America and the oldest Shia mosque in the US, has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1961.^[261] It was initially established to cater to the needs of the area's growing Muslim community.^[262] In its infancy, the center established connections to Egypt, as its early leader Mohammed Jawad Chirri secured funding from Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.^[263]

By the beginning of the 1980s, the impact of the Iranian Revolution began to reverberate in Dearborn. In his 1986 publication, "Shi'ites Under Attack," Chirri expressed support for the Revolution, claiming that "the Almighty chose to create in Iran a popular revolution, replacing the non-Islamic and Zionist agent government of the Shah [with] a real Islamic government."^[264] Chirri stated that "Iran's appearance on the political and military arena in the Middle East was an unexpected heavenly gift."^[265]

Chirri also openly voiced his support for Hezbollah. Chirri referred to the Lebanese Shia resistance to Israel (which came to be known as Hezbollah) as "heroes" that "defeated Israel," thus fulfilling "what Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States were not able to fulfill."^[266] Chirri went on to state that what the Lebanese Shia "achieved was physical evidence, proving that it

is possible for any Arab people to defeat the Zionists, if they believe in God and the hereafter and martyrdom."^[267] Furthermore, Chirri also expressed views in line with the Iranian regime's critique of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, condemning its author, Salman Rushdie, as "a dog that should be killed."^[268]

As a result of events taking place in the Middle East in the 1980s, the ICofA community became polarized. New religious scholars arrived from abroad to the ICofA to assume some of the responsibilities previously held by Imam Chirri, and this development further divided the community. In fact, many of the Islamic centers established in Dearborn since the 1980s were founded by preachers who, after working in the ICofA, decided to part ways with the Center to establish other projects.

The views of some ICofA preachers and scholars closely aligned with those of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For example, in 2010, when Hassan Qazwini – later the founder of the Islamic Institute of America (discussed further below) – was resident scholar and imam of the center, the ICofA held a memorial service for Grand Ayatollah Muhammed Hussain Fadlallah,^[269] who is broadly recognized as the spiritual leader of and political spokesman for Hezbollah.^[270] Hassan Qazwini later admitted he "had a special relationship with the late cleric" and adding that he "was once praised by Fadlallah in a TV interview."^[271]

In 2020, ICofA Imam Ibrahim Kazerooni gave a devotional speech about deceased IRGC-QF General Soleimani.^[272] More recently, ICofA also organized a memorial to mourn the death of Hezbollah fighter Ali Bazzi, "who died unjustly

^[262] Previously known as the Islamic Center of Detroit when it opened its doors in 1963.

^[262] Mainly made up of Lebanese and Iraqis. So predominant was the Lebanese community that Dearborn was nicknamed "Little Beirut."

as a martyr in an attack by the Zionist army.” [273] A few days before the memorial service, Hezbollah issued a statement presenting Ali Bazzi, who was killed alongside his brother and sister-in-law in an Israeli strike in Lebanon, as “a martyr, a mujahid that had been martyred on the road to Jerusalem.” [274]

Other scholars affiliated with the ICofA include Usama Abdulghani (referenced numerous times herein), who praised Ebrahim Raisi, the now-deceased President of Iran. Abdulghani also spoke publicly after the October 7, 2023 attacks and praised Hamas as “soldiers of Allah” [275] and called the event “a day of God.” [276]

Islamic Institute of Knowledge

After a short period serving as the ICofA’s imam in 1980, Lebanese national Abdel Latif Berry spearheaded the first major split from the Center. A disciple of Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, one of the main political references for and spiritual mentors of Hezbollah, [277] Berry advocated for a more conservative religious practice and attracted many of the more conservative leaning worshippers from the ICofA to the newly created Islamic Institute of Knowledge (IlofK). [278] IlofK has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1983. [279] Shortly after IlofK was established, a large portrait of Khomeini could be found presiding over the main meeting room. [280] In 2009, IlofK’s Imam Abdel Latif Berry spoke in honor of Imam Ruhullah Khomeini at a 20th anniversary remembrance event. [281]

In 2010, like the ICofA, IlofK publicly mourned the death of Hezbollah’s spiritual leader Fadlallah. At the event, Imam Elahi (discussed at length herein) referred to Fadlallah as “a great scholar.” [282] At the same event, IlofK Sheikh Baqir Berry said Fadlallah provided “the true explanation of Islam.” [283] In the wake of the October 7 attacks on Israel, IlofK held a

candlelight vigil where they blamed Israel for the events and compared Israel to the Nazis, a message consistent with Iran’s narrative. [284] In April 2024, IlofK imam Baqir Berry echoed Iranian regime rhetoric comparing Israel to ISIS, calling Israel a “great imminent danger” and advocating for the removal of Israel. [285]

Islamic House of Wisdom

Another former preacher at ICofA with clear pro- Iranian regime views is imam Mohammad Ali Elahi, who served as the ICofA’s imam and religious director between 1991 and 1995. [286] According to a CIA report, the Iranian-born imam served as head of the Iranian Navy’s political-ideological office in 1982, [287] an allegation reiterated by Congress [288] and addressed but not denied by Elahi himself in a 2023 speech. [289] After five years heading ICofA’s religious office, Elahi and his followers established the Islamic House of Wisdom (IHW), an Islamic center which eventually became a beneficiary of the Alavi Foundation aid program [290] and which has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1996. [291]

Elahi’s connections to the Iranian regime have continued since his time in the Navy; the numerous photographs of Elahi with high-level Iranian politicians and religious leaders that he regularly publishes on his social media networks speak to his ties to the Islamic Republic. These include Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, fourth Iranian President, [292] Mohammad Khatami, fifth Iranian President, [293] Hassan Rouhani, [294] and the recently deceased Ebrahim Raisi. [295] In addition, Imam Elahi is the only identifiable American member of ABWA’s General Assembly, and can be seen travelling to Iran to attend the meetings of the Assembly. [296] The ABWA, as Textbox 4 explains, is one of the most important entities created by the Iranian regime to spread its soft power internationally.

Figure 16: Picture of Imam Ali Elahi with Hassan Rouhani, former President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. [\[297\]](#)



Figure 17: Picture of Imam Ali Elahi (in the center of the picture, the fourth man on the right) with the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. [\[298\]](#)

Unsurprisingly, it is not uncommon to find praise for Khomeini and the Iranian regime coming from both the IHW and Elahi. In the numerous posts glorifying Khomeini, Elahi describes the founder of the Islamic Republic as “the leader who led the greatest revolution in the history of Islam,”^[299] and “an exceptional religious authority who combined religion and reason, morality and modernization, purification and civilization.”^[300] Similarly, Elahi exalts the virtues of the “Iranian democracy”^[301] as an example that “should inspire the world and especially those still living under dictatorship.”^[302] Following the 2024 helicopter crash that killed, among others, Iran’s President Raisi and Foreign Minister Elahi and the IHW arranged a special memorial service “in solidarity with the people of the Islamic Republic of Iran and advocates of “peace and justice globally” as “an expression of appreciation for those served humanity with their lives.”^[303]

Furthermore, what arguably constitutes the most problematic aspect of Imam Elahi’s persona is his explicit and continuous support for Hezbollah. In fact, interviewed on his views about the Lebanese terrorist organization in 2007, Imam Elahi said that:

We need to have another interview talking about whether Hezbollah is a terrorist organization or not. I know that legally in the U.S. now, Hezbollah is on that list. [...] They [Hezbollah] were resisting against [Israeli] occupation. I think that is something that is supported even by our government.^[304]

Before that, in a 1995 Arab American News article, Imam Elahi was quoted saying: “If my blood would help the liberation of Lebanon, I would give my blood to liberate Lebanon.”^[305] More recently, in 2010, the IHW also organized a six-day memorial service for Hussain Fadlallah, broadly recognized as the spiritual

leader of Hezbollah,^[306] describing him as “the voice of wisdom, moderation, peace, justice, freedom, human unity and dignity.”^[307]

Elahi has also expressed controversial political positions in line with Tehran’s narrative, such as describing the killing of IRGC-QF’s General Soleimani as a political assassination escalating tensions in the Middle East,^[308] or declaring that “Netanyahu is like a Hitler of our century [carrying] a holocaust against the Palestinians.”^[309] Furthermore, echoing pro-Iranian regime rhetoric, Elahi has also cast doubts regarding Al-Qaeda’s role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks.^[310]

Despite his experience in the Iranian Navy, his close ties to and explicit support for the Iranian regime and Hezbollah, and his litany of problematic statements, Elahi is largely perceived by some in the political establishment—including Michigan’s Governor Gretchen Whitmer,^[311] numerous U.S. Congressmen such as Gary C. Peters,^[312] Debbie Dingell^[313] or the late John Conyers,^[314] and U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris—as a figure worth engaging.



Figure 18: Imam Ali Elahi with Former Secretary of State John Kerry during the 2020 presidential elections campaign^[315]

Figure 19: Imam Elahi with Vice President Kamala Harris at a vaccination mobilization event.^[316]



Islamic Institute of America

Chronologically, the last noteworthy split from the ICofA is the one led by Hassan Qazwini. Born in Iraq and a graduate of the Islamic Seminary in Qom, Iran,^[317] Qazwini served as the resident scholar at ICofA for eighteen years, from 1997 until 2015.^[318] Qazwini went on to lead the Islamic Institute of America (IlofA), which has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 2012.^[319]

Qazwini is arguably one of the most influential Shia figures in the US. The gallery on his

personal website illustrates this, as it displays pictures of the imam with the most prominent American politicians of the last quarter of a century, including Al Gore, Bill Clinton, Colin Powell, George Bush, Barak Obama and John Kerry.^[320] He even delivered an opening prayer as the guest chaplain in the United States Congress in 2003, when he was still ICofA's imam.^[321]

Figure 20: Imam Hassan Qazwini with Barak Obama during the Presidential Election (2008) (left).^[322] Imam Hassan Qazwini with Secretary of State John Kerry during an Iftar Dinner at the State Department (2014) (right).^[323]



Although less obvious than those of Elahi, Qazwini's ties to Iran are also quite close. Qazwini is married to the daughter of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad al-Shirazi, an important figure during the first years after the foundation of the Islamic Republic and spiritual guide of the Movement of Vanguard Missionaries, an umbrella organization for various Iran-based militant groups in the early '80s.^[324] Additionally, Qazwini comes from a prominent Iraqi religious family with deep roots in Karbala among whose members are some of the global Shia community's most influential figures. His father, Ayatollah Morteza Qazwini, is a

distinguished pro-Iranian cleric^[325] with an important role in spreading the regime's ideology through the ABWA.^[326] Tellingly, he described General Soleimani as "a hero [...] the pride of the resistance."^[327] Ayatollah Morteza Qazwini was also an associate of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis,^[328] Secretary General of the U.S.-designated Kata'ib Hezbollah,^[329] who was killed in the same operation that ended Soleimani's life.^[330]

Another prominent member of Qazwini's family is his brother, Moustafa Qazwini, the founder and president of the Shia Muslim Council of Southern

^[326] As stated previously in this report, the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly is an organization founded in 1990 by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei known for its propaganda and support of Islamist militant groups in the Middle East.

California, (on which more below), who served as representative of Ayatollah Ruhani to the United States,^[331] in addition to being a regular contributor to Islam Oriente ^[332] at MIU.^[333]

While Qazwini has become a relevant and well-known figure for his discourse and activism advocating for Muslims' integration into Western culture, it is nonetheless true that his positions regarding American foreign policy and the diplomatic relations among Middle Eastern countries are highly controversial and have numerous nuances that resonate with official Iranian discourse. Qazwini, for example, has consistently opposed any rapprochement between Israel and its neighbors. He described budding Saudi-Israel proto-diplomatic relations as "an alliance to fight Iran," and accused Israel, whom he calls "the enemies of Islam," of having a sinister plan to divide Muslims and turn Sunni Muslims against Iran.^[334]

Several of Qazwini's sermons on Quds Day have marked antisemitic and conspiratorial tones. For example, he has stated that "Jerusalem was a Muslim city and will be a Muslim city, no matter how much Israel will try to change its identity."^[335] He has also said that Israel is clearly behind ISIS and that "ISIS is playing the role of the arm of the Zionists in the Muslim world."^[336]

Criticism of America, specifically its antiterrorism operations abroad, is also a frequent topic in Qazwini's discourse. For example, in response to the American operation that killed General Soleimani, the imam described the U.S. "[...] send[ing] drones to the other side of the world to attack individuals that have supposedly killed American people or American soldiers" as

"defying all international laws and the sovereignty of so many independent countries."^[337] Furthermore, he described the January 6, 2021 riots at the US Capitol as a punishment from God in retaliation for Trump's arrogance one year earlier when US forces "caus[ed] a big carnage there, in Iraq, killing one of the most distinguished Iraqi leaders, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis,^[338] along with a guest [Qasem Soleimani], a guest, who was protected by all international treaties."^[339]

Like other Islamic centers in this report, the IlofA also organized a memorial service mourning the deaths of President Ebrahim Raisi and the Foreign Minister of Iran.^[340]

The Awaited One Foundation

The array of centers in Dearborn that propagate the ideology and agenda of the Iranian regime is not limited solely to those borne out of the ICofA. The Awaited One Foundation (AOF), a non-profit organization founded in 2007 and operating as a federally tax-exempt organization since 2018,^[341] is one such center. While its physical facilities may not match those of other Islamic centers in Dearborn, AOF enjoys a significant and dynamic online presence, with several parallel projects that garner high levels of engagement from its community members.

One of its most successful online projects is Islamic Insights, a publication that has significantly grown since its creation in 2007 as a humble 8-page black and white bi-weekly newsletter.^[342] The site, now converted into a holistic news and

^[333] Al Mustafa International University is one of the Iranian regime's main tools to recruit and train foreign assets as well as to spread its ideology to new audiences.

^[338] Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, his real name being Jamal Ja'far Muhammad Ali Al Ibrahim, was Secretary-General of Kata'ib Hezbollah, a Khomeinist militia responsible for killing hundreds of U.S. soldiers in Iraq, and deputy chief of the Popular Mobilization Forces.

Islamic lifestyle publication, constitutes an extensive repository which includes contributions from numerous well-known pro-Iranian preachers and even now-deceased chairman of Hamas' Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh.^[343]

In addition to including a compendium of texts on the figure and ideology of Khomeini, the portal also includes translations of numerous texts by Iranian top leaders and religious figures such as Khamenei, particularly those messages and speeches directed to the West.^[344] Other than praising the Iranian Revolution as a "moral and political triumph over corruption and brainwashed mentality,"^[345] the repository also ticks the boxes of anti-Americanism and support of all Iran-aligned proxies, describing Hezbollah as "a Lebanese resistance movement,"^[346] and Hamas as "a Palestinian liberation organization."^[347]

The imams who give sermons at AOF also gravitate toward the different actors that disseminate the Iranian regime's influence. In addition to Hamza Sodagar (on whom, more later), other imams who participate in the center's activities include Shaikh Hassanain Rajabali ^[348] and Shaikh Amin Rastani ^[349] who are fervent promoters of the regime's ideology and regular collaborators of the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Mission. The Ahlul Bayt Islamic Mission is the British chapter of the ABWA (Textbox 4), which exports Iran's revolutionary Islamist ideology throughout Europe. In addition to its obvious political bias, it is also worth highlighting the Assembly's focus on anti-Westernism, particularly the perniciousness of women's behavior in the West and the virtues of a pious and modest way of life and aesthetic. ^[350]

Great Revelations Academy

Another noteworthy organization in the Dearborn area is the Great Revelations Academy, a private Islamic school founded in

2015 by supporters of Grand Ayatollah (Sayyid) Muhammed Hussain Fadlallah with the express purpose of passing on his Islamist teachings to the next generation of Shias in the U.S. ^[351] It has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 2012. ^[352] According to the Academy's board, the school's educational curriculum "follows the same philosophy, mission, and vision of Sayed Fadlallah." ^[353] Additionally, the Great Revelation Academy's Facebook page is evidence of the school's reverence for Fadlallah, as it features posts with quotes from the Grand Ayatollah, calling him "Our Founder, leader, and inspiration." ^[354]

This is deeply concerning as Fadlallah has long been recognized as the spiritual leader of and political spokesman for Hezbollah.^[355] Fadlallah justified Hezbollah's 1983 US Marine barracks bombing and suicide attacks against Israeli troops. ^[356] Fadlallah's stature was such that after his death in 2010, Hezbollah's Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, issued a public statement mourning the death of "a merciful father and a wise guide," ^[357] and the Supreme Leader Khamenei referred to him as a "true companion of the Islamic Republic." ^[358]



Figure 21: Picture of Ayatollah Muhammed Hussain Fadlallah at the Great Revelations Academy premises. ^[359]

The Great Revelations Academy has lived up to its founding charter by following in Fadlallah's footsteps in supporting and associating with supporters of Hezbollah and the Axis of Resistance. The Academy has welcomed numerous Axis of Resistance-aligned speakers such as Sheikh Usama Abdulghani (discussed herein), leading imam of the Hadi Institute, and Sheikh Amin Rastani (discussed herein), who is also a regular contributor at the previously mentioned AOF and has a long track of speeches praising Khomeini as being the "complete package" and a leader that "freed the world and the masses."^[360]

The Hadi Institute

Another Dearborn-based institution that has publicly supported the Islamic Republic and its allies is the Hadi Institute, which focuses predominantly on youth education and the raising of "productive, positive, and proud Muslims ensuring Islamic principles are implemented at all grade levels."^[361] The Hadi Institute operates as a federally tax-exempt organization, under the name *The Association of Spiritual Renewal*, and has been tax-exempt since 2015.^[362] The Institute's leading imam is Usama Abdulghani, referenced numerous times herein. Abdulghani is an Iranian-educated scholar who does not hide his admiration for the Islamic Republic.^[363] Abdulghani's speeches typically focus on the youth and emphasize the importance of their education as "the victory of all victories is training the youth. Human pillars."^[364] In July 2024, at Hadi Institute ceremonies, he gave a speech wherein he focused on the need to educate the children to understand and obey the words of Hassan Nasrallah and Khamenei.^[365]

Under the spiritual leadership of Abdulghani, the Hadi Institute has developed several youth-led projects that have contributed significantly

to increasing the reach of its ideology. One of the most noteworthy is the ideological dissemination channel, *The Light of Guidance*, a multimedia platform with hundreds of videos dedicated to spreading the ideology of the Islamic Republic and the legacy of its leaders.^[366] In addition to lectures by Sheikh Abdulghani, the Light of Guidance's different platforms also serve to archive sermons and talks by other pro-Iran clerics such as Salim Yusufali and Amin Rastani.^[367] It was through this channel that the Hadi Institute presented its condolences for the death of the President of Iran Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May 2024: "we extend our deepest condolences to our Master, Imam Mahdi(atfs), our Leader, Imam Khamenei, and the entire Ummah, on the passing of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sayyid Ibrahim Raisi and his companions."^[368]



Figure 22: Screenshots picturing Hadi Institute's Imam Usama Abdulghani accompanied by the images of Commander Qassem Soleimani (top)^[369] and Ruhollah Khomeini (down).^[370]

In addition, the Hadi Institute annually celebrates the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution^[371] and the passing of Khomeini,^[372] of whom the Hadi Institute officials consider themselves “sons and daughters.”^[373] Furthermore, the Institute also has a long record of praising prominent leaders from the Axis of Resistance. In January 2024, the Institute organized a “Commemoration of the Martyrs” to honor the late IRGC-QF General Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis, the leader of the Iranian-sponsored Popular Mobilization Forces in Iraq. In the same event, one of the speakers accused the CIA and the Mossad of being behind ISIS.^[374] Hadi’s leading imam, Usama Abdulghani, described Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis as “martyrs [...], the true miracle of Imam Khomeini.”^[375] Abdulghani has also expressed support for Hamas, describing October 7 as “one of the days of God [...] a miracle come true,”^[376] and Hamas attackers as “honorable men, [...] lions defending the entire nation of Muhammad.”^[377]

Another Hadi Institute affiliate has openly demonstrated anti-American, pro-Iranian sentiments at a 2024 Al Quds Day Celebration. Tarek Bazzi said, “This is why Imam Khomeini, who declared the International Al-Quds Day, this is why he would say to pour all of your chants and all of your shouts upon the head of America.” As the crowd chanted “Death to America,” Bazzi stated, “Malcom [sic] X said, and I quote: ‘We live in one of the rottenest countries that has ever existed on this Earth.’”^[378] Tarek Bazzi was an MC at the July ceremonies hosted by the Hadi Institute wherein Abdulghani spoke about Iran and Hezbollah. Tarek Bazzi was also listed as a Director of the Hadi Institute in its 2018 Form 990.^[379]

Additional pro-Iran Organizations

The Muslim Student Association - Persian-Speaking Group

The Muslim Student Association-Persian-Speaking Group (MSA-PSG)^[380] is a D.C.-based ^[381] Iranian student association founded in 1964 by Mostafa Chamran and Ebrahim Yazdi as a split from the Iranian Student Confederation. The group led by Chamran and Yazdi decided to sever relations with the Iranian Student Confederation because of what they understood as an inadequate response to the uprising following the 1963 demonstrations in Iran against the arrest of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.^[382] Upon its establishment, MSA-PSG was incorporated as the “Persian-speaking group” of the Muslim Students Association of the United States and Canada (MSA), a group of primarily Arab and Pakistani students in the United States.^[383] MSA was founded mostly by supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s and has flourished with hundreds of chapters currently operating on campuses across the United States.^[384]

The profile of the founders leaves little room for doubt about the ideological affiliation of the MSA-PSG. One of them was Ebrahim Yazdi (1931-2017), a prominent Iranian politician and diplomat who would end up playing a pivotal role in the 1979 Islamic Revolution, subsequently serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs.^[385] Further, Yazdi’s idea of celebrating Quds Day was endorsed by Khomeini in August 1979.^[386] Mostafa Chamran (1932-1981) was a Berkeley-educated engineer, military commander, and influential politician during the revolution, notable for his leadership in establishing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and his contributions to Iran’s military development after the establishment of the

^[380] ^[380] Also referred to as *Anjoman Islamie*.

Islamic Republic.^[387] Chamran served as Minister of National Defense of Iran and as Deputy Prime Minister for Revolutionary Affairs. Before that, during the 7 years that he lived in Lebanon, Chamran also played an important role in founding Amal.^[388]

According to MSA-PSG's own account, "The initial goal of this organization was to support justice movements in Palestine and bring awareness about dictatorships reigning in Muslim countries, namely Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's monarchy in Iran." However, as a

Figure 23: MSA-PSG demonstration in 1989.^[389]



^[388] Amal is a Lebanese Shiite political party and militia that emerged during the Lebanese Civil War. Founded in 1975 by Imam Musa al-Sadr, Mostafa Chamran and Hussein al-Husseini, it initially aimed to advocate for Shia rights and resist Israeli occupation. Over time, it evolved into a significant political force in Lebanon, representing Shia interests alongside Hezbollah.

consequence of the political transformations undergone by Iran and following “the huge wave of Islamic Awakening following Iran’s Islamic Revolution, MSA-PSG is adjusting its goals and vision to address the new needs and challenges among the Muslim community.” Today, “MSA-PSG strives to honor the struggle and sincerity of its founders by serving Muslims and Islamic communities throughout the United States, [...] focusing our efforts on addressing the challenges facing Islamic communities in Western society.”^[390] However, in the message handed to the attendees of their 2008 annual conference, MSA-PSG stated that “at this current stage, our quest is to emulate the life of our hero in contemporary times, Imam Khomeini, as we strive to establish the Islamic State of North America.”^[391] In earlier versions of its website, MSA-PSG referred to its activities and efforts towards the achievement of its goals as being carried out “under the guidance of the supreme leader.”^[392]

With such a long-standing existence, the activities and ideology of this Iranian front group have been well known to security services for a considerable time. A 1987 FBI report noted that in their Annual Conference held that year in Dallas, “all attendees had to pledge allegiance to their Muslim faith and loyalty to the Government of Iran.”^[393] During the same conference, according to the same FBI report, “the enemies of Islam specifically identified were Israel, the United States, USSR, as well as the Government of Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.” A 1994 FBI report delving into Hezbollah’s activities in the U.S. details that the terrorist organization “is known to be in contact with the Anjoman Islamic [sic] (MSA-PSG), an Iranian student association active in the United States.”^[394]

In his 1998 testimony on foreign terrorism presence before the Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government



Figure 24: Images of Mostafa Chamran glorifying his military aspect published by MSA-PSG.

Information of the U.S. Senate, Dale Watson, then- Chief of the FBI International Terrorism Section, identified the MSA-PSG as a “pro-Iranian student organization known as the Anjoman Islamie, which is comprised almost exclusively of fanatical, anti-American, Iranian Shiite Muslims.” On the nature of its relationship with Iran, Watson stated the Iranian Government relied heavily on MSA-PSG students “for low-level intelligence and technical expertise,”^[395] further adding that MSA-PSG “also provides a significant resource base which allows the Government of Iran to maintain the capability to mount operations against the United States, if it so decided.”^[396]

Although MSA-PSG commemorates all the Iranian regime milestones and important dates, such as the anniversary of Islamic Revolution,^[397] the death of Khomeini,^[398] and Quds Day,^[399] the most distinctive aspect of MSA-PSG’s activities is the militaristic nature of its online activism, characterized by revolutionary armed iconography, a culture of martyrdom that permeates much of their discourse,^[400] and constant nods to both the legacy of Hezbollah and Iranian military leaders and “martyrs.” Among other figures, MSA-PSG celebrates the legacy of leaders from the Lebanese terrorist organization such as Abbas al-Musawi, one of Hezbollah’s founders and Secretary General, and Imad Mughniyeh, one of the founding members of Lebanon’s Islamic Jihad Organization and number two in Hezbollah’s leadership at the time of his 2008 assassination, and refers to Lebanon as the “land of the leader of Resistance, the man of devotion and endurance, his eminence Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah.”^[401] As for Iran, numerous military figures –from commanders to ground soldiers– are held up as heroes, examples of sacrifice for the homeland and a life dedicated to religion and the pursuit of the goals of the

revolution. The notable presence of prominent Iranian military figures should not be overlooked, but also the military and paramilitary aesthetic that extends through a large part of MSA-PSG publications, transmits a message of mobilization, popular determination and a sense of belonging to a volunteer militia.



Figure 25: Picture of the late Imad Mughniyeh, founding member of Lebanon’s Islamic Jihad and number two in Hezbollah’s leadership at the time of his assassination. Published by MSA-PSG.^[402]

Figure 26: Pictures of Iranian religious and military leaders published by the MSA-PSG: Mohammad Beheshti, broadly considered the primary architect of Iran's post-revolution constitution and the administrative structure of the Islamic Republic (up, left);^[403] Mohammad Keyhani, IRGC commander (up, right);^[404] Mostafa Sadrzadeh, Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps leader (down, left);^[405] and Abbas Babaei, Iranian pilot and brigadier-general in the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (down, right).^[406]



Beyond an extensive online presence, the main event organized by MSA-PSG is its annual conference, which in 2024 reached its 51st edition. Similar to the IEC-H- spearheaded Muslim Congress' annual conference, MSA-PSG's annual conference usually starts with a message by one of Iran's top religious figures. Recently, Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli, a close associate of Ayatollah Khomeini who served in various senior positions in Iran's judiciary,^[407]

was the scholar in charge of opening both events during the last years.^[408] In fact, the Muslim Congress and MSA-PSG collaborate on initiatives.^[409]

The MSA-PSG annual conference, in addition to featuring a stage that includes all the paraphernalia, aesthetics, and iconography of the Iranian regime, typically brings together a significant number of Iranian-aligned sheikhs

and scholars—most of whom are regular participants in the event—active in other centers examined in this report. A non-exhaustive list includes former IEC-M director and current Manassas Mosque leading imam Bahram Abolfazl Nahidian,^[410] former IEC-H director and current General Director for Ahlul Bayt World Assembly for Europe and America Ali Akbar Badiei,^[411] the Hadi Institute leading Imam Usama Abdulghani,^[412] Imam Muhammad al-Assi (on which more later),^[413] Hamza Sodagar (on which more later),^[414] and other pro-Iran clerics such as Salim Yusufali^[415] and Amin Rastani.^[416]

Shia Muslim Council of Southern California

The Shia Muslim Council of Southern California (SMC) is an umbrella organization, co-founded in 2014 by Sayed Moustafa Qazwini, which comprises many of the Shia Muslim centers and mosques in southern California, including the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County (IECOC), which has operated as a federally tax-exempt organization since 1998.^[417] Shortly after arriving in the United States in 1994, Moustafa Qazwini founded the IECOC.^[418]

Moustafa Qazwini is the son of Ayatollah Morteza Qazwini – a distinguished pro-Iranian cleric– and the brother of Hassan Qazwini (about whom, see above).^[419] Upon his arrival in the United States, Moustafa Qazwini served as the representative of Ayatollah Ruhani to the US.^[420] Qazwini is also a regular contributor to Islam Oriente,^[421] MIU's project targeting Spanish-speaking communities to spread Iranian regime ideology and recruit supporters.^[422] As

noted, the US government has designated MIU for its role in recruiting on behalf of the IRGC-QF (Textbox 3).

Like his brother, albeit less popular than he is, Moustafa Qazwini projects the image of a moderate leader and a promoter of interfaith dialogue. However, the imam's statements and the initiatives organized by SMC and the IECOC attest to his own commitment to a discourse similar to that of other individuals in Iran's foreign influence network.

Qazwini has a long track record of strong anti-Israel and conspiratorial statements. In a 2009 sermon at his center, he stated that “when it comes to the infidels [Israelis], the enemies of God, the enemies of humanity, we have to be tough and aggressive with them.”^[423] He continued, stating that “the nature of those Zionists, if you read their history in the Quran, and the Old Testament – not only the Quran – you will find that their nature is offensive, aggressive, and hostile. Israel today survives on hostility [...]. You cannot have peace with such an entity. This is an illusion.”^[424] Although time has passed since then, the imam has continued to repeatedly compare the nature of Israelis and Jews to Christians and Muslims, often with a subtle but perceptible anti-Semitic bias.^[425] Predictably, Imam Moustafa Qazwini is a firm opponent of the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel. According to Qazwini, Arab countries taking steps towards the recognition of Israel only creates further turbulence in the region.^[426] In 2016, he stated that “the U.S. is the only nation on earth that, when seeking the highest office, candidates must uncritically appease a foreign

^[419] For further context on Ayatollah Morteza Qazwini and Hassan Qazwini see the section on the Islamic Institute of America (IIOFA).

^[422] Al Mustafa International University is one of the Iranian regime's main tools to recruit and train foreign assets as well as to spread its ideology to new audiences.

nation (Israel).”^[427] In a May 2024 sermon about the ongoing war in Gaza, Moustafa Qazwini stated:

Politicians, especially American politicians, the American administration, American legislators, American senators, are complicit in this war (Israel’s war in Gaza), in these crimes. They are instigating it, they are fueling it, they are helping it, they are supporting it, they are encouraging Israel. Some of those senators are worse than the Nazis, worse than Hitler, encouraging Israel to go ‘finish them up.’^[428]

Moustafa Qazwini’s opinions regarding different terrorist organizations are also highly problematic. In 2017, during a sermon at IECOC, Moustafa Qazwini stated that “ISIS is the production of the Israeli intelligence.”^[429] “Most of their officers were trained in Israel, including Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi,” he added. ^[430] His statements made headlines in local and national press, leading to strong public backlash that forced the imam to recant his statements and apologize.^[431]

When speaking on Hamas, Moustafa Qazwini openly declared that “the one who wants to free his country is not a terrorist. If [they] are terrorist, then George Washington was the first terrorist. Abraham Lincoln was the first terrorist. They freed America from the British occupation.”^[432] More recently, following the October 7th terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel, Moustafa Qazwini justified the events by citing the Quran 22:39: “Permission has been granted to those who are being fought, because they have been wronged. And indeed, God is competent to give them victory.”^[433]

Several centers under the SMC umbrella celebrate Quds Day,^[434] the day of protest against Israel declared by Khomeini in 1979. Furthermore, within the framework of its

growing activism since October 7, SMC also suggests carrying out a list of actions to support Palestine, such as encouraging its community members to like, repost, follow, and share messages by the Palestinian Youth Movement,^[435] an organization active in the US and Canada with which the SMC regularly partners in organizing support events.^[436] The Palestinian Youth Movement is a grassroots organization which celebrated the October 7th terrorist attacks^[437] and has since continuously expressed its support for the terrorist organization that it describes as “resistance fighters,” “the protectors of Palestine” and “the Palestinian resistance.” Additionally, in a recent event organized by the SMC, tote bags labeled with the controversial slogan, “from the river to the sea,” were distributed.^[438]

One of SMC’s member organizations, the Al Kisa Foundation, produced a song praying for Allah to kill the oppressors (Israel) and liberate Jerusalem. The song’s chorus proclaims that “The path to Quds [passes] through Karbala,” which is one of Iran’s most famous revolutionary slogans.^[439] It is also worth mentioning that some of the imams that regularly preach or speak in the mosques and Islamic centers associated with the SMC, such as Hamza Sodagar^[440] or Salim Yusufali,^[441] are among the array of individuals known for disseminating Iran’s influence in the US and Canada.

The Manassas Mosque

Founded in 1994 in the DC suburb of Manassas, Virginia, the Manassas Mosque has a stated mission of “nourish[ing] a community of pious, educated, socially conscious, and active Muslims living in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area” through the provision of “religious, educational and social services.”^[442] It has operated as a federally tax-exempt

organization since 2004.^[443] Although it is not a center owned by the Alavi Foundation, evidence indicates that it is a close satellite of it and, according to Alavi's publicly filed Form 990s, the Manassas Mosque received over \$200,000 from Alavi between 2004-2005. In addition, Bahram Abolfazl Nahidian, now Manassas Mosque's leading imam, was one of the founders and first directors of the IEC-M in Potomac, Maryland.^[444] Tellingly, the announcement of the memorial service, "Honoring the Life and Legacy of Shaheed Raisi," (the Iranian President who died in 2024) in the Manassas Mosque also includes relevant information to attend the memorial service in the IEC-M, evidencing not only the ideological connection, but also, to a certain level, the organizational connection between both centers in which Nahidian has played a fundamental role.^[445]

Nahidian has a long-documented history of expressing support for the Iranian regime and its proxy organizations. In 2010, he accused Israel of having orchestrated the 9/11 attacks and the CIA of conspiring to divide Muslims.^[446] In 2023, he praised General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as heroes who "led the axis of resistance defending Muslim countries, particularly Iraq and Syria against ISIS, the U.S.-Israeli funded militias."^[447]

Further illustrating the Manassas Mosque's ideological affinity with the Iranian regime is its celebration of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the glorification of Khomeini's legacy,^{[448][449]} and the commemoration of his death.^[450] In fact, the anniversaries of the Revolution are celebrated by decorating the inside of the mosque with pictures of IRGC martyrs, a life-sized display of Ayatollah Khomeini, Iranian flags and revolutionary slogans.^[451] These events garner coverage from Tasnim News Agency, a semi-official news

outlet controlled by the IRGC that was designated by the US government in 2023 for its actions in support of the IRGC.^[452] These expressions of affection towards the regime of the ayatollahs have drawn concern from members of U.S. Congress, prompting them to write a letter in July 2023 to the U.S. Attorney General requesting that the Department of Justice and the intelligence community investigate the presence of Iranian influence in U.S. Islamic cultural and religious institutions. ^[453]

Predictably, the Manassas Mosque actively participates in Quds Day. ^[454] Moreover, shortly after the October 7th terrorist attacks on Israel, while advertising a series of events in support of Palestine, the mosque stated:

We offer our sincerest condolences to our Palestinian brothers and sisters for the massacre and genocide taking place in Gaza. Palestine will be free and victorious against the oppressors. We stand firmly with the Palestinian Resistance (Hamas) and the courageous people of Palestine. With the help of Allah (swt), they will bring liberation and justice to Palestine and to the rest of the world iA.^[455] The Israeli regime is weak and afraid of all the calls for the freedom of Palestine taking place all over the globe. The regime's days are numbered.^[456]

In response to the death of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in July 2024, the Manassas Mosque released a statement on social media:

Our leader Ismail Haniyeh, Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, attained martyrdom while serving in the way of Allah (swt). The cowardly Zionist regime assassinated him while he was a guest in Tehran, Iran. The martyrdom of our commander is a great loss for the entire Islamic world. We unequivocally condemn this heinous crime committed by the corrupt Israeli

and U.S. government...As we honor the legacy of Ismail Haniyeh, let us remember what our duty and responsibility is towards this cause. We remain united, steadfast, and determined to continue our fight for justice. May Allah (swt) grant us patience, resilience, and ultimately success in our efforts. In solidarity, Manassas Mosque.^[457]

Individual Activists/Preachers

Unlike the previous subchapter, focused on the dissemination of the ideology of the Iranian regime from Islamic centers, mosques and educational institutions, this section focuses on individual actors. In this context, individual actors can be defined as unaffiliated activists, preachers, and leaders who, despite not having a permanent position at a specific mosque or cultural center, strive to spread content of a similar nature by touring religious centers in the US or using online platforms.

Much like the organizations discussed above, the following individuals have a demonstrable background of affinity for the Iranian regime, actively working to advance its agenda, and promoting the regime's ideology and its proxy network of terrorist organizations among America's Shia community. As for institutions, this listing is not exhaustive.

Hamza Sodagar

Influential Shia leader Sheikh Hamza Sodagar is an American-born imam who moved to Qom, Iran, in the early 2000s to study in the Shia Islamic Seminary of Qom^[458] before returning to the US. Sodagar is well known for his travels throughout North America and Europe, speaking at events hosted by various Shia Islamic centers and organizations with the aim

of promoting Iranian regime ideology and support. Sodagar is also popular online; his sermons are widely circulated by other Shia organizations and individuals from the same ideological strand.

Sodagar has succeeded in establishing himself as one of the most prominent Shia leaders in the US, capable of building a wide audience of listeners without running his own mosque or Islamic center. Instead of maintaining influence in one specific mosque or center, in fact, Sodagar spreads his ideology in a variety of locations. Sodagar has participated in events at the ICE-H and the IEC-M and has also worked with the Awaited One Foundation and the Shia Muslim Council of Southern California, all described above. Furthermore, his work extends across dozens of other mosques throughout the United States and other Western countries. Tellingly, in 2018 Denmark banned him from entering the country.^[452]

Although he had been a highly prolific preacher both in physical spaces and online for several decades, his pro-Iranian activism and extremist rhetoric did not attract much media attention until 2016. It was then when a 2010 sermon from Sodagar on homosexuality resurfaced and made headlines due to a UK human rights association calling for the revocation of his visa.^[460] The statement was as follows:

If there's homosexual men, the punishment is one of five things. One, the easiest one maybe, is cut their head off, that's the easiest. The second is, burn them to death. Third, throw them off a cliff. Fourth, tear down a wall on them so they die. Fifth, a combination of the above. We have a hadith on that. Now, whether someone's going to accept that, that's up to the jurists to read that and understand. There're definitely some of those which apply [...].^[461]

Sodagar has a long track record of praising Iranian leaders and actions. Giving a sermon after the murder of Iranian women's rights activist Mahsa Amini in 2022,^[462] Sodagar made it clear that he not only believes that the activist deserved her deadly fate, but he also added "God knows what her condition is in the afterlife because of all the wrong that she has done. Forget about killed, she was not touched."^[463] Firmly aligning himself with the Iranian regime, he also added:

The Iranian people chose to be governed according to the Quran, and they chose as the Quran says –and as the Hadith say– to have a faqih who is the best faqih that they can find [...]. They identified that person: first Imam Khomeini and now Ayatollah Khamenei. We want to be governed by them. We want to be governed according to the Quran.^[464]

Figure 27: Poster advertising the #KhomeiniForAll event, organized by the Hussaini Movement of India (left).^[465] Screenshot of Hamza Sodagar giving a lecture during the #KhomeiniForAll event (right).^[466]



^[462] Mahsa Amini was arrested by the Religious Morality Police in September 2022 for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory hijab law. Days later she died as a result of police brutality during her arrest. Her death and the circumstances surrounding it were followed by an unprecedented wave of civil unrest and protests against the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Figure 28: Hamza Sodagar speaking at the the Imam Khomeini Annual Conference 2012, organized by the Ahlul Bayt Islamic Mission, the British chapter of the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly.^[467]



Aside from his praise of Iranian leaders, it is not unusual for Sodagar to also fiercely criticize the US or call for the downfall of Israel.^[468] In one such sermon, Sodagar encourages his constituents to collectively mobilize and use the power of their numbers to facilitate the demise of Israel. In doing so, the Shia cleric states that his followers are fulfilling their religious duty to the 12th imam of Shia Islam and have the divine support of God.^[469] A regular contributor to Quds Day rallies and related events, Sodagar believes that the participation of people in Quds Day, under the leadership of Khomeini and Khamenei, is effectively contributing to the downfall of Israel and should be seen as a form of jihad against the oppressors, and that Allah prefers believers who commit to jihad.^[470]

Further indicative of Sodagar's views are his sermons congratulating the *ummah* for the martyrdom of Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, whom the preacher regards as heroes and *āyāt* (proof)^[471] from the Quran that other martyrs will come in the future.^[472] He also stated that Soleimani, al-Muhandis, and their respective organizations are not terrorists, but it is the US who is a terrorist and blamed it for the creation of ISIS. He cemented his scathing criticism of the US by calling it the "Great Satan,"^[473] a term that is often used by the Iranian regime and other Islamic extremists to indicate their vehement opposition to America.

Muhammad al-Asi

Together with Sodagar, Muhammad al-Asi is perhaps the most prominent Iranian-aligned Shia leader in the US. Born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1951 from a Syrian-Lebanese family, Al-Asi's career can only be described as unique compared to other Shia clerics. Before becoming an imam at the IEC-M, where he served for 14 years,^[474] Al-Asi worked as a US Air Force pharmacy clerk and even attempted, unsuccessfully, to join the CIA.^[475] By 1994, the cleric, despite having served in the US Air Force, signed a public letter directed to Ali Khamenei, Khomeini's successor and current Supreme Leader of Iran, swearing allegiance to him "as leader of the Muslims."^[476]

Years later, referring to a wave of attacks against secular intellectuals in predominantly Muslim countries and the existing fatwa

against Salman Rushdie, al-Asi stated: "I don't find that a tragedy at all [...]. I have no sympathy for these types of Western-infested individuals, individuals infested with Western values, who try to peddle these values in a non-Western, particularly an Islamic, society."^[477] His strong positions regarding freethinkers and freedom of expression in the Muslim world contrast markedly with his idealized image of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In an interview in 2008,^[478] he stated that the "Islamic state in Iran represents, I think, a very relevant example of how we Muslims in the world can go about bringing into existence a change that we all yearn for." The Iranian Revolution, according to him is a "model for other Muslims" because it resorts to a leadership "that is clean, 100% sure of itself, relies upon Allah and His Prophet instead of on political connections and external support-structures behind the scenes."^[479]

Figure 29: Picture of Muhammad al-Asi and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (left).^[480] Picture of Muhammad al-Asi shaking hands with President Rouhani (right).^[481]



^[478] *Crescent International* is a pro-Iranian news magazine. Muhammad al-Asi sits on its board of editors.

Figure 30: Muhmmad al-Asi (left, sitting) participating in the 40th MSA-PSG Annual Conference in Dallas, TX, together with Hamza Sodagar (right, standing).^[482]



Though al-Asi's activism dates back to the early '80s, it has not faded over time. In 2012, for a special issue of the magazine *Islamic Awakening*, edited by the Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, several international Muslim scholars including Al-Asi dedicated words to eulogize the figure of Khomeini. The following paragraph was Al-Asi's contribution:

Our dear Imam Khomeini was a real bastion whose peer may appear once in years. During the late decades of colonialism, meaningless disinformation spread especially among the Muslim, the most important of which is the separation of the religion from the politics. However, with the unique leadership of Imam

Khomeini and his efforts, this problem is not valid anymore. Imam Khomeini disrupted all the world's regulations and exposed the western and eastern superpowers' true nature and intentions. While the entire universe knew the USA and the Soviet Union's competition as an obvious fact, it then became clear that both the countries were in the same side. Imam Khomeini was the sincere model of real independence. He was in fact the father of independence for the world's Muslim and the Weak.^[483]

In addition to the aforementioned, some of the conspiracy theories actively conveyed by the preacher in his sermons, his anti-Westernism, his obsession with Israel and his opinions on

Saudi Arabia align seamlessly with the narrative employed by Tehran for decades. “The events of 9/11 were planned by the American administration, to be used as a pretext and justification to fight terrorism,”^[484] al-Asi stated in a documentary about the attacks, broadcasted by the Iranian public TV. In a paper the preacher presented at the International Seerah Conference in Karachi, Pakistan, he said that, “the Western definition of politics is sullied and corrupt (while) the Islamic definition of politics is clean and healthy.” In the same event he further alleged that “Muslims should overturn the system of kufr” and avoid “joining the ‘modern and developed’ world [...]”^[485]

Additionally, his antisemitic views have been evident since as early as 1998, when al-Asi wrote:

It is enough to have the Jews running the only superpower in the world, the US, to know that Israel is shielded, guarded, and protected from all political angles [...] The Jewish worshippers of Israel who are publicly celebrating 50 years of a historical aberration are, by all the forces of history and divine decree, celebrating the coming of a day when they will have to come to terms with Islamic self-determination in the Holy Land area and beyond that into the expanses of Africa and Asia. The prophet of Allah, upon whom be peace, summed it up when he said: “The final hour shall not commence until the Muslims engage Yahud in warfare. And the Muslims will deal the deathblow to Yahud.”^[486]

His discourse on Israel has not changed significantly since then, and with more or less vehemence, he continues to disseminate it via publications and during Quds Day events.^[487]

Perfectly overlapping with Iran’s discourse on Saudi Arabia, Al-Asi criticizes Saudi Arabia’s role in international politics, as well as the perniciousness of Wahhabism and its dangerous spread worldwide. Speaking to Press TV, al-Asi shared his anti-Israel, anti-US, and anti-Saudi views, stating that the US and Israel “have tried to create a wave of terrorism in order to destabilize the Middle East” and “resort to Saudi Arabia as a catalyst to advance their plots in West Asia as they cannot make Muslim nations in the region obey their orders.”^[488] He even added that the US promotes sectarianism in the region via its ties with Saudi Arabia to “justify the atrocious terror activities that they [the US] are responsible for.”^[489] It was due to his harsh criticism of Saudi Arabia that al-Asi was dismissed from the Islamic Center in Washington.^[490]

Al-Asi’s continued relevance demonstrates that, despite being from an older generation than Sodagar and other prominent Shia leaders, he has successfully adapted to today’s method of disseminating ideas and has garnered a wide, global audience through his extensive publishing of content via third parties, such as the Iranian-sympathetic magazine *Crescent International*^[491] (where he sits on the editorial board)^[492] or the aforementioned *Islamic Awakening*, and individual activism across various online platforms.

^[491] According to its official website, *Crescent International*’s has “published incisive current affairs analysis charting the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the rest of the Muslim world, and the West’s response to it.” Additionally, it states that “We are a publication not working within the secular/Western narrative of what journalism should be.” To explain its Iran friendly coverage, it states that “Islamic Iran is getting enough bashing from 99% of the global media and we are not going to join racists and neocolonial designs against the only working Islamic model” and that “We will not be a part of the problem for Islamic Iran, but part of the Islamic value system that has taken institutional root in Iran, and we will not hesitate to advocate its successes at every opportunity.” For further context see also: “About Us.” *Crescent International: Newsmagazine of the Islamic Movement International*. Accessed May 14, 2024. <https://crescent.icit-digital.org/about>

Maulana Shamshad Haider

Maulana Shamshad Haider is a US-based Shia cleric of Pakistani origin notable for his public support of the Iranian regime. Haider is based in Houston, Texas, where he has practiced as a psychotherapist since 2010.^[493] While less active than Hamza Sodagar or Al-Asi when it comes to online activity, he has become a regular preacher that actively tours around the most important mosques and Islamic centers in Texas.

In 2004, Haider served as imam at the Metroplex Organization of Muslims in North Texas, which, that same year, held a conference celebrating the 16th anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death that featured a number of Shia leaders and activists as speakers, including Mohammad al-Asi. When asked about the conference, Haider defended it, stating that Khomeini "has been unjustly portrayed in the Western media"^[494] and that the conference sought to "understand the whole person of Ayatollah Khomeini, not just one slogan of, for example, 'Great Satan' or one of his political speeches."^[495] Haider further justified the event's praise of Khomeini, stating that "politics was only a portion of his personality, he was an ascetic poet, and he was a jurisprudent."^[496] Simultaneously, the imam also denied Khomeini's responsibility for the 1979 U.S. hostage crisis, instead claiming that Khomeini "became the voice of the oppressed people, and he did not sanction the takeover of the embassy [...] Emotions were very high, and he could not tell the people to come back because people saw the connection of the U.S. embassy with the Shah."^[497]

Haider regularly features at events commemorating Iran's key political anniversaries. A speech delivered at IEC-H on the 31st anniversary of Khomeini's death

perfectly embodies the ideology of Khomeini affinity Haider is spreading:

If we use the word 'imam' (to refer to Khomeini) we will be reinforcing that idea that yes, for example, Khomeini is an international leader and a global leader for all the Muslims of the world. [...] If we call (Khomeini) a 'leader,' then he stands with the rest of the leaders, like Hitler, Mussolini, Napoleon, Stalin, and other leaders of the world. That will allow to bring him down and compare him with the rest of leaders. [...] Now we have Ayatollah Khamenei in the same place as Imam Khomeini, people should view him [...] not just as an Ayatollah, not just as the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, not just as a revolutionary, but as Imam al-ummah, leader of the world of Islam.^[498]

North and South of the Border

Iranian actors and their proxies are also active throughout the Western hemisphere. Canada and several Latin American countries, in fact, have long seen activities similar to those witnessed in the United States and so far described in this report. The fact that most of the countries in which they operate devote little to no attention to the phenomenon or, in some cases, even enjoy a close alliance with Iran, makes them highly permissive environments, ideal safe heavens in which Iran and Axis of Resistance actors can carry out a variety of activities virtually undisturbed. As US security agencies and policymakers have long warned, this dynamic has important security implications for the United States.

Canada

During the last few decades, Canada has undertaken extensive measures to hold the government of Iran accountable.^[499] In 2012, Canada designated Iran as a state supporter of terrorism under the State Immunity Act and has maintained it on the list in every biannual review cycle since then.^[500] In November 2022, pursuant to subparagraph 35(1)(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Canada further designated Iran as a regime that has engaged in terrorism and systematic and gross human rights violations, and consequently stipulated that thousands of senior officials of the Iranian regime, including many members of the IRGC,^[501] (are inadmissible to

Canada.^[502] Over time, these measures have resulted in Canada sanctioning more than 200 Iranian individuals and 250 entities.^[503]

Additionally, Hamas and Hezbollah have both been on the designated terrorist organizations list since November and December of 2002, respectively.^[504] The Houthis, on the other hand, have not been explicitly designated as a terrorist organization by Canada, which participates in the US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian.^[505] However, the Canadian government has expressed concern about the Houthis for being “supported and armed by Iran” and their involvement in human rights abuses, their attacks on civilian targets, and their destabilization of Yemen.^[506]

Despite these tough positions, Canada sees the presence of Iranian networks within its own territory. In 2022, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) stated that there were credible death threats from Iran “designed to silence those who speak out publicly” against the regime.^[507] Later that year, a CSIS spokesperson affirmed that “the agency is aware that hostile state actors, including the Islamic Republic of Iran, monitor and intimidate Canadian communities.”^[508] In its 2023 annual report, CSIS stated that it “is actively investigating threats to life emanating from the Islamic Republic of Iran based on credible intelligence, as well as possible precursors to violence including harassment and intimidation from threat actors linked to Iran.”^[509]

^[501] Canada designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist entity in June 2024. See for context: “Government of Canada lists the IRGC as a terrorist entity.” Public Safety Canada, Government of Canada. June 19, 2024. Accessed August 19, 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2024/06/government-of-canada-lists-the-irgc-as-a-terrorist-entity.html>

To cite just a few recent examples, in January 2024, one Iranian and two Canadians were indicted in a murder-for-hire scheme aimed at killing two Iranian dissidents in Maryland, U.S., on behalf of Iran's intelligence services.^[510] In 2021, Iranian intelligence officials were indicted for having conspired to kidnap a US-Iranian human rights activist had previously targeted other victims in Canada.^[511] The activist, living under protection, was later told by the FBI: "we suggest you not to go to Canada. It won't be safe for you."^[512]

On the procurement side, Canada's international status in industry, technology, trade, and finance makes the country an appealing target for Iranian networks to capitalize on opportunities. In 2010, for example, Iranian-Canadian Mahmoud Yadegari was sentenced to 20 months in prison for attempting to re-export to Iran U.S.-made pressure transducers, which could be used in nuclear programs.^[513] In 2014, Lee Specialties Ltd., an oilfield equipment company, pleaded guilty to attempting to send to Iran a shipment of O-rings with potential nuclear applications and violating sanctions.^[514]

Some procurement networks known to have been operating in Canada have been dismantled and prosecuted in the United States. Some recent examples include Mehdi Hashemi, who was convicted in 2020 by the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California for illegally exporting controlled machine tools from Canada and the US to Iran.^[515] In 2022, Bader Fakih, a Canadian resident, was indicted for conspiring with others to illegally export an industrial microwave system and a counter-drone system from the United States to Iran. ^[516]

Another aspect to consider is Iran's network of religious influence which, much like in the United States, extends throughout Canada. An example of organizations in this network, and

arguably the most important one, is the Islamic Shia Assembly (ISA) of Canada, a federation of Shia Muslim organizations which includes some eighty Islamic centers and mosques in the country. ISA had its charitable organization status revoked by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) in 2016.^[517] The CRA based its revocation on several findings that led it to conclude that the Assembly was "furthering unstated collateral purposes of acting as a facilitator organization to support the operational goals of the social-political organization, Iranian Ahlul Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) in Canada."^[518] The Ahlul Bayt World Assembly – previously discussed in this report – is an organization founded in 1990 by Ali Khamenei and dedicated to spreading Iran's Shia Islam and supporting the regime's agenda internationally.

Various cultural centers in Canada have also been part of the array of tools employed by the Iranian regime to advance its agenda. The Iranian Cultural Centre in Ottawa, whose expenses were covered by the Iranian Embassy until it was shut down in 2012, is a perfect example of this dynamic. In addition to commemorating the legacy of the regime's most iconic figures and other milestones of the Revolution,^[519] court proceedings showed that the embassy sought to use the cultural center to recruit Canadians under the guise of outreach programs.^[520] Shortly before closing, in an event organized at the Center, the cultural attaché of the Embassy encouraged Iranians to "occupy high-level key positions" in the Canadian government and to "resist being melted into the dominant Canadian culture."^[521]

Additionally, there are other organizations which, under the veneer of promotion of human rights, contribute to enriching the ecosystem of Iranian influence in Canada. The Canadian Defenders for Human Rights (CD4HR) is an example of this dynamic as, not only is its director a regular contributor to events organized

by the Ahlul Bayt World Assembly,^[522] but CD4HR has also been extremely public about its support for the Iranian regime and its proxies. Among its recent activities of this nature, it is worth highlighting that CD4HR organized a vigil to commemorate the anniversary of “the martyrdom” of Qassem Soleimani, in which its director led “death to America” chants.^[523]

Hezbollah has also long been active in Canada. The topic will be treated below in Section 5, together with Hezbollah’s activities in the United States.

Canada’s approach towards Iran and its proxies showcases both vigilance and inconsistencies. On one hand, the country has implemented robust measures, including designating Iran as a state supporter of terrorism and imposing significant sanctions on numerous Iranian individuals and entities. However, the persistent presence of high-level individuals and the influence of Iranian networks within the country reveal a certain degree of permissiveness. These networks, comprising both overt and covert agents, have expanded Iran’s influence, posing significant threats to Iranian dissidents and Canadian national security.

Latin America

Since the 1979 Revolution and more noticeably since the beginning of the 21st century, Iran has been progressively striving to establish and expand a dynamic network of alliances in Latin America, relying on both commercial and political

partners as an alternative counterbalance to US hegemony.^[524]

The extent of Iran’s activities, presence, and influence in the region has grown although the Shia community in Latin America is very small. A 2012 report from the Pew Research Center provides comprehensive data on Muslim populations in Latin America, setting the total at 840,000 Muslims. Shia Muslims are believed to account for 10-13% of the total Muslim population, which gives an approximate figure of about 100,000 Shia Muslims in Latin America.^[525] Although the data provided by the partisan Ahlul Bayt World Assembly (ABWA) seems to overestimate the Shia population in some countries,^[526] it nonetheless provides the same conclusion: Shia Muslims account for less than 0.002% of the population in Latin America.

While the extent of Iran’s ties with Latin American countries varies—with Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, and Nicaragua being long established as its main partners—it is worth noting that no Latin American country imposes sanctions on the Iranian regime in a manner similar to that of the United States or Canada. As for Hezbollah, only Argentina (2019),^[527] Paraguay (2019),^[528] Colombia (2020),^[529] Honduras (2020),^[530] and Guatemala (2020),^[531] have designated it a terrorist organization. As a result, Iran faces few constraints in broadening its sphere of influence throughout the region.

During his 2012 Latin American tour, then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad tellingly stated: “Our relations with Latin American countries are very good. The culture

^[524] These spheres do not always maintain a direct correlation. For example, Iran shares a substantial economic relationship with Brazil, while in the political realm, no such affinities exist. The opposite can be said of its relationship with Venezuela.

^[527] Unlike the U.S. and most European countries, although numerous Latin American governments regularly describe the operations carried by Hamas as “terrorist attacks,” none of them have designated Hamas a terrorist organization. See for context: Garrison, Cassandra. “Argentina designa a Hezbollah como organización terrorista, ordena congelar activos.” Reuters, July 18, 2019. Accessed May 21, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKCN1UD1ZL/>

of the peoples of that region and their historical demands are similar to the demands of the Iranian people.”^[532] In order to increase its presence and expand its influence, Iran relies on a significant number of cultural and social centers distributed throughout the continent. These centers are usually located near the respective Iranian embassies and diplomatic missions, under whose control they often operate.^[533]

Beyond physical cultural centers, Iran has strongly invested in media expansion with content tailored not only for Spanish-speaking audiences, but very specifically Latin American. In addition to HispanTV,^[534] a Spanish-language subsidiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Corporation (IRIB) established in 2012, there is also a sizeable amount of Spanish-language content from other media outlets owned or funded by the Iranian government, such as Press TV and Al-Alam News Network.^[535] Additionally, Iran, which currently ranks 176th out of the 180 countries assessed in the 2024 World Press Freedom Index,^[536] does not merely use its own networks for its opinion-building and disinformation campaigns, but also relies on the support provided by the Venezuelan TeleSUR and Russia Today en Español.^[537]

Two soft power tools deserve special attention regarding Iran’s strategy of expanding influence in Latin America through religion: the ABWA and the Islam Oriente Department of Al-Mustafa International University. With an annual budget of \$80 million exclusively dedicated to Latin America, MIU’s Islam Oriente

is particularly active in producing content promoting the Iranian regime and its version of Shia Islam, praising Axis of Resistance groups and undermining the image of the United States.^[538] The organization also provides Latin American students with scholarships to study in Iran. On December 8, 2020, the US Department of the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control, pursuant to Executive Order 13224 (2001),^[539] designated Al-Mustafa “for enabling IRGC-QF intelligence operations by allowing its student body, which includes large numbers of foreign and American students, to serve as an international recruitment network.”^[540] According to Treasury, not only “the IRGC-QF uses Al-Mustafa University to develop student exchanges with foreign universities for the purposes of indoctrinating and recruiting foreign sources” from whom “IRGC-QF members sought to collect intelligence,”^[541] but also serves as a comprehensive platform for recruiting, training and radicalizing individuals, some of which “have been sent to Syria to fight on behalf of IRGC-QF-led militias.”^[542]

The result of Iran’s extensive efforts to expand its influence through religious messaging is that the main Shia mosques and some of the most important religious study centers in Latin America are under its direct influence. While the list is not exhaustive, it includes the Mezquita At-Tauhid^[543] and the Centro de Estudios Islámicos Árabes y Persas Dr. Osvaldo A. Machado Mouret in Argentina,^[544] the Centro Islâmico no Brasil,^[545] the Casa Cultural Islámica Ahlul Bayt in Colombia,^[546] the Centro Islámico Ahlul Bayt de México,^[547] the Centro de

^[535] Iran has also ventured into radio broadcasting and, of course, in providing a Spanish version of its official news agency, the *Agencia de Noticias de la República Islámica de Irán* (in English IRNA, The Islamic Republic News Agency).

^[545] Centro Cultural Islâmico no Brasil functions as an umbrella for several pro-Iranian regime religious institutions in the country. A look at its official YouTube channel leaves little doubt about its ideological affinities. See for context: Arresala (@Arresala), “Arresala videos,” YouTube. Accessed May 21, 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/user/Arresala/videos>

^[546] The Casa Cultural Islámica Ahlul Bayt runs, among other projects, the NGO Shahid Soleimani.

Intercambio Cultural Latinoamericano - Islam Venezuela,^[548] and the Asociación de la Comunidad Islámica Ahlul Bait Bolivia.^[549]

But Iran's presence in Latin America has not been limited to spreading its propaganda and building influence networks. It has also included, in fact, the planning and execution of violent actions. Most notably, in the 1990s, Iran and Hezbollah operatives carried out two large terrorist attacks in Buenos Aires, first against the Israeli embassy (1992) and then the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (1994), which together claimed over 100 lives. After 30 years of prolonged investigations and a complex judicial process, in April 2024 Argentina's highest criminal court concluded that Iran had planned the attack in retaliation for Argentina reneging on a nuclear cooperation deal with Tehran, while Hezbollah was responsible for executing it.^[550]

The judicial investigations into these terrorist attacks have been fraught with controversy, marked by allegations of corruption and political interference. A central figure in these investigations was Alberto Nisman, a special prosecutor who accused the then-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner of covering up Iran's involvement in the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina bombing to facilitate trade agreements. Nisman was found dead in his apartment on January 18, 2015, a day before he was set to present his accusations to Congress. His death, officially declared a suicide, has been heavily disputed.^[551]

One of the masterminds behind the Buenos Aires attacks was recently charged in the United States. In December 2023, the Department of Justice announced charges against Samuel Salman El Reda, a high-level Hezbollah member.^[552] In charging him with providing material support to Hezbollah and

military training, the indictment delineates the details of his alleged involvement in the bombing of the AMIA building. Further, he is accused of helping to recruit and train Hezbollah operatives, many of whom were deployed around the world to conduct pre-operational surveillance and assist in stockpiling chemicals, such as ammonium nitrate, used in explosives.^[553]

During the three decades since the attacks in Buenos Aires, Hezbollah has continued to expand in Latin America, particularly through its involvement with organized crime and other terrorist organizations including the Colombian FARC, the Primeiro Comando Capital in Brazil or Los Zetas and Sinaloa cartels in Mexico.^[554] Over the years, Hezbollah relations with these organizations have reportedly taken the form of arms sales, money laundering and paramilitary training, primarily to support their operations in the Middle East.^[555] Hezbollah's presence on the continent is primarily focused on establishing logistical and financial networks.^[556] One of them is the vast network it established in the Tri-Border Area (TBA) of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina since the mid-1980s, where the organization has been engaging in illicit activities like money laundering and drug trafficking to finance its operations.^[557]

But Hezbollah's operations in Latin America—whether economic, logistical or operational—extend well beyond the TBA. In Mexico, for example, local authorities arrested Rafic Mohammad Labboun in 2012. Labboun, a dual US-Lebanese citizen, was involved in Hezbollah-linked credit card fraud and money laundering, highlighting the group's reach into US financial systems.^[558] In addition, Hezbollah operatives have also profited from the extensive human smuggling networks working between Mexico and the US.^[559]

However, what is arguably more concerning for US security is the potential nexus between Iran's Quds Force, Hezbollah operatives, and Mexican drug cartels evidenced by the murder-for-hire plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. As mentioned, in October 2011, Manssor Arbabsiar, a naturalized U.S. citizen, and Gholam Shakuri, an Iranian Quds Force member, were charged in a conspiracy to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. on American soil.^[560]

Finally, the latest operation that helps to shed light on Hezbollah networks in Latin America is Operation Trapiche (November 2023), in which Brazilian authorities allegedly thwarted a Hezbollah terror plot targeting Jewish sites in the country. In addition to preventing terrorist attacks against Jewish targets, Operation Trapiche also revealed Hezbollah's vast network of contacts across multiple countries in Latin America – Paraguay, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil – as well as the connections of its operatives to prominent Hezbollah figures in Lebanon.^[561]

Hezbollah in North America

Hezbollah in the United States

Hezbollah is the crown jewel in Iran's Axis of Resistance, the oldest and most powerful of Tehran's many proxies. The group has a history of targeting America, dating back to the 1983 attacks against the US Embassy and the US Marines Barracks in Beirut. US officials have consistently warned that Hezbollah, designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997,^[562] poses a threat to the United States' interests around the world^[563] and to the homeland.^[564] Most recently, they have highlighted that that persistent danger has increased since the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, 2023.^[565]

In light of these developments, it is significant that Hezbollah has long established a foothold in the United States (beyond, as described in the previous section, Canada and parts of Latin America). The country, in fact, has long been an important resource for the group, particularly in terms of fundraising and weapons procurement.^[566] However, its interests have the potential to expand beyond these support activities. As FBI Director Christopher Wray recently stated in testimonies before Congress, "the arrests of individuals in the United States allegedly linked to Hizballah's main overseas terrorist arm, and their intelligence-collection

and procurement efforts, demonstrate Hizballah's interest in long-term contingency planning activities here in the Homeland."^[567] Wray also stated that, "FBI arrests in recent years also indicate that Hezbollah has tried to seed operatives, establish infrastructure, and engage in spying here domestically, raising our concern that they may be contingency planning for future operations in the United States."^[568]

In 2022, the Program on Extremism, together with the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and the National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE), published a report on Hezbollah's activities in the United States. The report is based on an analysis of the prosecutions involving 128 individuals active in the United States between 1997 and 2020 who had varying connections to the organization.^[569] We note 14 additional defendants charged in four Hezbollah-related cases initiated by the Department of Justice after the report's publication, bringing the total to 142.^[570]

The report provided a statistical overview of the individuals, including trends in age, gender, geographical areas of operation, and sentencing.^[571] Moreover, it delineated two main activities in which Hezbollah supporters in

^[570] These prosecutions do not include additional action by the government, such as seizures of Hezbollah websites. Earlier cases had continued activity during this period, including resolutions such as plea arrangements and sentences imposed.

^[571] The majority of the 128 defendants included in the report were male - 108 men- ranging in age from 22 to 68 when they were arrested. The average age for men was 42 years old, and 40 years old for women. The study noted that this average age was higher than that for Islamic State- affiliated defendants (28 years), perhaps because many of the Hezbollah cases were financial in nature. Geographically, the defendants were active across 11 states, and several main clusters were observed in Michigan, California, North Carolina and New York, mostly because of the large criminal systems developed in those areas. In terms of outcome, most of the defendants were convicted and sentenced, with the average length of sentence almost 50 months. Interestingly, defendants convicted on material support charges received a greater average sentence length of 85.6 months, in contrast to those convicted on non-terror-related charges, whose average sentence was 42.8 months.

America engaged: financial support (109 defendants) and operational support (19 defendants).^[572] The vast majority of Hezbollah-linked individuals arrested in the US, in fact, provided financial assistance as money launderers/bundlers/fraudsters and goods smugglers, all of whom raised funds for Hezbollah or directly provided or transferred funds to the group.^[573] This category includes a variety of activities where individuals committed fraud, sent or laundered funds for Hezbollah, often in connection with proceeds from drugs, tobacco, or the sale of electronics.^[574] In contrast, the cases where defendants provided operational support (such as human smuggling and surveillance operations) are far fewer, making up only about 13% of the total number of cases included in the report.^[575]

It is important to note that networks, often involving friends or family members, played a central role in the group's activities in the United States, particularly in fundraising operations.^[576] These networks were often linked across states and countries, spanning 11 U.S. states and evidencing a global reach.^[577] One example is the Charlotte, North Carolina-Dearborn, Michigan enterprise co-led by Mohammad Hammoud,^[578] who had major links to Hezbollah leaders in Lebanon.^[579] The members of this operation included Hammoud family members, a mixture of local Charlotte residents, plus individuals motivated by money, but not necessarily by ideology. The cell purchased more than \$8.5 million worth of cigarettes, smuggled them across several states, and netted over \$2 million in profits until the North

Carolina operation was shut down in 2000.^[580] In 2003, 11 members of the Michigan network were indicted on charges under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO). Two of those defendants, Elias Akhdar and Hassan Makki,^[581] served as major links to Charlotte's Hammoud and to Hezbollah operatives around the world, including in Lebanon and Canada.^[582]

A 2023 case constitutes another example of the sophisticated nature of Hezbollah's financing networks in America.^[583] Federal prosecutors in New York allege that a designated Hezbollah financier, Nazem Ahmad, and eight associates, many of whom are close relatives of his, engaged in a scheme to evade terror-related sanctions by using a complex web of international business entities to obtain valuable art from artists and art galleries in the United States, and to secure US-based diamond-grading services, while obscuring Ahmad's involvement in and benefit from these activities. Approximately \$160 million worth of artwork and diamond-grading services were transacted through the U.S. financial system.^[584]

US-based Hezbollah activities often include international funding schemes.^[585] One example is the case of siblings Hor and Amara Akl of Toledo, Ohio. The two met with an FBI confidential source whom they thought supported Hezbollah and discussed various ways to send money to the group's leaders in Lebanon.^[586] The couple subsequently hid \$200,000 cash in car accessories to be shipped to Lebanon, with the money to be used by

^[578] At his initial sentencing, Hammoud was sentenced to 155-years in prison under the then-mandatory Sentencing Guidelines. The Supreme Court vacated that sentence two years later after deciding *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296. On resentencing in 2011, the court granted a variance and imposed a 30-year sentence. "U.S. Judge Slashes 155-Year Terror Sentence." CBS News, January 27, 2011. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-judge-slashes-155-year-terror-sentence/>. On February 11, 2022, Hammoud filed a motion for a sentence reduction, asserting "extraordinary and compelling reasons" for a reduction, arguing that his sentence should be reduced to time served. The court granted a sentence reduction to 300 months imprisonment. *United States v. Hammoud*, 2022 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 214184, 2022 WL 17326071 (W.D.N.C., Charlotte Division, November 29, 2022, Filed).

Hezbollah. Arrested in Ohio in June 2010, both pled guilty in May 2011 to conspiracy to provide material support to the terror group and were subsequently sentenced: Amera Akl to 40 months in prison and Hor Akl, to 75 months in prison.^[587]

Similarly, smuggling operations based in the United States, often using international networks, have provided support to the terror group. One such case charged seven defendants – four individuals and three freight forwarding companies – with violating the IEEPA to export and ship electronic products to the Galeria Page shopping center, a designated terror entity since December 6, 2006,^[588] located on the Paraguayan side of the Tri-Border Area.^[589] According to the US Treasury Department, the Galeria Page, managed and owned by Hezbollah members, “serves as a source of fundraising for Hizballah... and is locally considered the central headquarters for Hizballah members in the TBA.”^[590] The defendants allegedly created fake invoices with fictitious ultimate recipients and false addresses on the export paperwork. Additionally, wire transfer payments from Paraguay to the U.S.-based distributors were routed through several entities to hide where they actually originated.^[591]

However, some of Hezbollah’s goals in the United States extend beyond financing or smuggling, as demonstrated by a number of Islamic Jihad Organization (“IJO”) cases,^[592] in which individuals trained by Hezbollah were alleged to have engaged in violent plots and had conducted surveillance activities against American domestic targets.^[593] The IJO, also known as the External Security Organization, is the section of Hezbollah “responsible for the planning and coordination of intelligence, counterintelligence, and terrorist activities on behalf of Hizballah outside of Lebanon.”^[594]

One case involved Samer El Debek of Michigan and Ali Kourani from Bronx, New York, who had been recruited and trained by Hezbollah, including in the use of weapons like rocket-propelled grenade launchers and machine guns. El Debek conducted surveillance in Panama to locate the U.S. and Israeli embassies and assess the vulnerabilities of the Panama Canal and ships going through it. Kourani surveilled potential targets in the United States, including military and law enforcement facilities in New York City.^[595]

Kourani and El Debek were arrested in June 2017 and charged in separate complaints.^[596] Both were charged with providing and conspiring to provide material support to Hezbollah, receipt of and conspiring to receive military training by Hezbollah, conspiring to possess, use and carry machine guns and destructive devices during and in relation to violent crimes, making and receiving, and conspiring to receive contribution of funds, goods and services to/from Hezbollah.^[597] Kourani was additionally charged with unlawful procurement of citizenship or naturalization to facilitate an act of international terrorism.^[598] Convicted in May 2019, Kourani was sentenced to 40 years in prison.^[599] El Debek’s case has still not come to trial at the time of the writing of this report.

In a similar case, Alexei Saab, a member of the IJO, was arrested and charged in July 2019^[600] on conspiracy to provide material support to Hezbollah and other charges, including unlawful procurement of citizenship and marriage fraud.^[601] Saab had been trained by Hezbollah in surveillance, bomb making and firearms, and became a naturalized U.S. citizen.^[602] While living in New Jersey, he allegedly conducted surveillance of possible targets to help Hezbollah prepare for potential future attacks against the United States.^[603] On May 11, 2022,

Saab was found guilty of some of the charges, and acquitted of others.^[604] Ultimately, Saab was found guilty of receiving military training from Hezbollah, marriage fraud conspiracy and making false statements.^[605] On May 23, 2023, Saab was sentenced to 12 years in prison.^[606]

While these cases are few, they nonetheless suggest the possibility, as highlighted by FBI Director Wray, that Hezbollah could broaden its activity in the U.S. into attack planning missions.

Hezbollah in Canada

According to a 2006 assessment written by Canada's Integrated Threat Assessment Centre (ITAC), Hezbollah "has had a presence in Canada" and "its activities in Canada include fundraising, [redacted] collection and the procurement of equipment [redacted]."^[607] In fact, Hezbollah has been active in the country since the 1980s, largely conducting the same activities its members and sympathizers have carried out in the United States. In the 1990s, for example, Hezbollah operatives active in British Columbia, Quebec and Ontario set up a procurement network to obtain military items the group needed and sent them to Lebanon via human couriers.^[608] And already in the 1990s Hezbollah cells operating in the United States were linked to individuals, groups, or banking facilities in Canada.^[609] For example, Said Harb, a defendant in the Charlotte

cigarette smuggling case, was a major link between the US network and the Canadian Hezbollah network. And like the familial structure of many of the operatives' groups, "one of the major players in the Canadian Hezbollah network was a childhood friend of Harb's, and Harb provided him with false IDs that the Hezbollah operatives in Canada used to replicate Harb's credit card 'bust out' scams."^[610]

Hezbollah was designated a terrorist organization by Canada in December 2002.^[611] According to Public Safety Canada, Hezbollah "threatens Canadians and Canadian interests... It remains one of the world's most capable terrorist groups. Hizballah has networks around the world, including in Canada, and uses the networks for recruitment, fundraising and procurement."^[612] In its 2018 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada, Public Safety Canada stated in the section on Shia extremism:

Hizballah operates within a global and highly diversified logistical and support structure, receiving considerable material and financial support from individuals and businesses in many countries, including Canada. Often, the individuals that support the group are not directly tied to Hizballah structures, but may sympathize with the organization for political reasons. Additionally, Hizballah operates an international network of charities that may divert funds to the organization or benefit from Hizballah funding. As a result, Hizballah has

^[609] See, e.g., *United States v. Hammoud et al.*, (3:00-cr-00147 W.D.N.C. 2000). "Mohammed Hassan Dbouk and his brother-in-law, Ali Adham Amhaz, ran the Canadian portion of this [Charlotte cigarette smuggling] network under the command of Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis (Hezbollah's chief military procurement officer). Their activities were funded in part with money that Laqis sent from Lebanon, in addition to their own criminal activities in Canada (e.g., credit card and banking scams). Among the items that they purchased in Canada and the U.S. and smuggled into Lebanon were night-vision goggles, global positioning systems, stun guns, naval equipment, nitrogen cutters and laser range finders. The Canadian Hezbollah network also sought to take out life insurance policies for Hezbollah operatives committing acts of terrorism in the Middle East." Prepared Statement of Matthew Levitt, Senior Fellow and Director of Terrorism Studies, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee: 8. May 25, 2005. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/LevittTestimony.pdf>

been a listed terrorist entity under the Criminal Code since 2002. Since that time, banks and financial institutions in Canada have had to freeze the entity's assets.^[613]

Similarly, Canada's Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada ("FINTRAC"), the national financial intelligence agency formed in 2000, has stated that Hezbollah has a "diversified funding structure and global reach" that facilitates its ability to raise funds from a variety of sources, including from domestic support.^[614] Criminal enterprises have included selling smuggled cigarettes and counterfeit Viagra^[615] and moving stolen luxury cars out of the country.^[616]

Canadian-based actors have often used tactics similar to those of Hezbollah operatives in the United States to obtain military materials for high-level Iranian officials in violation of sanctions, and in laundering money derived from criminal activity. For example, Canadian-Iranian citizen Ali Soofi was convicted and sentenced in US federal court for conspiring to violate the International Emergency Economic Powers Act ("IEEPA").^[617] Likewise, Hezbollah used the Lebanese Canadian Bank to launder large amounts of proceeds from cocaine sales.^[618]

Finally, Hezbollah's connections to Canada have also included terror attacks mounted by Canadians in other parts of the world. For example, one of the defendants in the 2012 Hezbollah bus bombing in Bulgaria that killed five Israeli tourists and the driver was a Lebanese-Canadian, Hassan El Hajj Hassan. Tried *in absentia* in Bulgaria, he and his co-defendant were found guilty of helping a Lebanese-French man in planting the bomb, and were sentenced to life in prison.^[619]

Conclusion

The Iranian regime engages in a broad array of nefarious activities inside America. In recent months, for example, US officials have warned of Tehran's efforts to influence the 2024 presidential elections by "seeking to stoke discord and undermine confidence in our democratic institutions, as we have seen them do in prior election cycles."^[620] Similarly, the Director of National Intelligence has stated that "Iranian government actors have sought to opportunistically take advantage of ongoing protests regarding the war in Gaza, using a playbook we've seen other actors use over the years. We have observed actors tied to Iran's government posing as activists online, seeking to encourage protests, and even providing financial support to protesters."^[621] Moreover, the US intelligence community has recently raised concerns about Iran's growing cyber capabilities aimed at "conduct[ing] cyber espionage operations, targeting the United States Government, and the defense industry and to disrupt critical infrastructure."^[622]

This report focused on threats to the US homeland emanating from Iran and its proxies that are more directly connected to extremism and political violence. The report's tripartite division underscores the multiplicity of efforts in which these actors engage, while making it clear that they are all interconnected and posing a challenge.

The tip of the iceberg, the most visible manifestation of the Iranian regime's *longa manus* inside America, is represented by the attempts on the part of its security apparatuses to conduct assassinations on American soil. Historically, most of the plots conceived by Tehran have been aimed at dissidents. It is a

pattern that began only a few months after the Revolution with the July 1980 assassination of Ali Akbar Tabatabaei in Bethesda and has continued all the way until current years with the repeated attempts to kill a famous Iranian dissident in the New York area. Moreover, in recent years Iran has escalated in its target selection by making the bold move of including high ranking US-based foreign diplomats and, even more brazenly, US officials. The decision appears to have been triggered by Tehran's publicly stated pledge to avenge the death of IRGC Quds Force general Qassem Soleimani.

Outsourcing the assassinations appears to be Tehran's favorite *modus operandi* in carrying out these attacks. It is a choice largely dictated by necessity, since the US homeland is a challenging operational environment for Iranian intelligence operatives. But it offers the Iranians also the non-secondary advantage of plausible deniability. Irrespective of what triggered the choice to use them, the proxies so far used by Tehran to carry out assassinations inside the US have tended to be elements who were not ideologically aligned (mostly from the criminal underworld) and who displayed relatively low levels of professionalism.

This pattern of using proxies is likely to continue in the near future, particularly as tensions between Iran, the Axis of Resistance and the US have grown substantially since the October 7, 2023 attacks in Israel and the subsequent regional conflict. The Department of Homeland Security warned before Congress in March 2024 that Iran typically "relies on individuals with pre-existing access to the United States for surveillance and lethal plotting—having previously used dual nationals, members of

criminal networks, and private investigators—and has attempted plots that do not require international travel for operatives.”^[623]

Similarly, the US intelligence community has also expressed concerns that Hezbollah might leverage US-based individuals and networks to carry out attacks. FBI Director Christopher Wray told Congress in November 2023 that “the arrests of individuals in the United States allegedly linked to Hezbollah’s main overseas terrorist arm and their intelligence collection and procurement efforts demonstrate Hezbollah’s interest in long-term contingency planning activities here in our homeland.” The FBI also stated that it “remains concerned Hezbollah, Iran’s primary strategic partner, could conduct retaliatory attacks against former US officials, not only overseas, but also in the US.”^[624]

In substance, the possibility that Iran and its proxies could mobilize known and trusted assets rather than hired guns to carry out some kind of violent action in the future is a concrete one. For this reason, it is important to gain an understanding of US-based actors and milieus that are close to the Iranian regime. This report sought to do exactly that by concentrating its second and third level of analysis on procurement and propaganda networks respectively.

Procurement networks could represent a natural recruitment pool for Iranian security apparatuses. As seen, many of the individuals who in recent years have been arrested for violating sanctions and providing goods or sources of revenue for the regime tend to have done so primarily for financial gain. But it is possible that the relationship they built with Iranian officials while conducting financial transactions for them could lead US-based individuals to develop an ideological affinity

and decide to carry out violent actions on their behalf. Similarly, it is also possible that Iranian officials could threaten some of their US-based financial intermediaries and compel them to engage in violence on their behalf. Whatever the possible dynamics, individuals and milieus that engage in sanction violating activities for the Iranian regime should constitute a target of scrutiny.

Equally important if not more realistic is the possibility that the Iranian regime could mobilize US-based individuals who are ideologically aligned. And it is in light of this possibility that the milieus analyzed in Section 3 of this report become particularly important. This report identified a web of entities and individuals with close personal, financial, organizational and ideological links to the Iranian regime operating throughout the United States. They spread Tehran’s religious and political worldview, glorifying the regime and its allies, undermining America and disseminating antisemitic views.

While their activities might be constitutionally protected, there is little doubt that they are also problematic, and not just in regard to a connection to a possible terrorist attack. The fact, for example, that educational facilities located in the suburbs of American cities teach the Iranian regime’s interpretation of Islam and political worldview to scores of American children should be seen as troubling. In the same vein, the fact that some of its leaders have acquired notoriety and act *de facto* as representatives of the entire Shia community in their area should not be neglected.

Also problematic, as this report highlighted, is the presence of extensive Iranian-linked networks in Canada and Latin America. Particularly in the latter, highly permissive environments allow Tehran and its proxies to

operate almost undisturbed, a dynamic that poses a security challenge not just to those countries but also to the United States.

Given the heightened geopolitical tensions that have followed the October 7, 2023 attacks and Iran's unrelenting commitment to highly adversarial positions towards the United States, an in-depth understanding of its networks inside the US and throughout the Western Hemisphere is of paramount importance. This required awareness applies not just to actors who are directly engaged in violent actions, but also to procurement and propaganda networks, as they not only serve useful roles for Tehran in and of itself but can also potentially be utilized to carry out attacks.

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[567] Prepared Statement of Christopher A. Wray, Director of the FBI, Before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, April 11, 2024, 5.; "Federal Bureau of Investigation Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2025." Federal Bureau of Investigation. April 11, 2024. Accessed May 23, 2024. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/federal-bureau-of-investigation-budget-request-for-fiscal-year-2025>

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States: Two Decades in Review." *The Program on Extremism at George Washington University, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and NCITE*, 9. June 2022. Accessed July 15, 2024. https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Hezbollah%27s_Operations_and_Networks_in_the_United_States_June30_2022.pdf. The report included defendants charged with providing material support to Hezbollah, a designated foreign terrorist organization, under 18 U.S. Code § 2339B, an example of clear evidence of the group's activity. Additionally, the study's investigators expanded the criteria of the dataset to include federal cases in which some individuals were linked to Hezbollah and its activities, but the participants were charged with non-terrorism offenses.

[570] These prosecutions do not include additional action by the government, such as seizures of Hezbollah websites. Earlier cases had continued activity during this period, including resolutions such as plea arrangements and sentences imposed.

[571] The majority of the 128 defendants included in the report were male - 108 men - ranging in age from 22 to 68 when they were arrested. The average age for men was 42 years old, and 40 years old for women. The study noted that this average age was higher than that for Islamic State- affiliated defendants (28 years), perhaps because many of the Hezbollah cases were financial in nature. Geographically, the defendants were active across 11 states, and several main clusters were observed in Michigan, California, North Carolina and New York, mostly because of the large criminal systems developed in those areas. In terms of outcome, most of the defendants were convicted and sentenced, with the average length of sentence almost 50 months. Interestingly, defendants convicted on material support charges received a greater average sentence length of 85.6 months, in contrast to

those convicted on non-terror-related charges, whose average sentence was 42.8 months.

[572] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 15-27.

[573] *Ibid*, 15.

[574] *Ibid*.

[575] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 21.

[576] *Ibid*, 28.

[577] *Ibid*.

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[579] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 17-18.

[580] Levitt, Matthew. “Hezbollah's Criminal Networks: Useful Idiots, Henchmen, and Organized Criminal Facilitators,” 158-159.

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[582] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 18.

[583] “OFAC-Designated Hezbollah Financier and Eight Associates Charged With Multiple Crimes Arising Out of Scheme to Evade Terrorism-Related Sanctions.” US Attorney's Office, Eastern District of New York Press Release. April 18, 2023. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-edny/pr/ofac-designated-hizballah-financier-and-eight-associates-charged-multiple-crimes>

[584] Redacted Indictment, *United States v. Nazem Ahmad et al.*, (1:23-cr-00139 E.D.N.Y. April 22, 2024).

[585] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 28.

[586] Indictment, *United States v. Akl et ano.*, (3:10-cr-00251 N.D. Ohio, June 7, 2010).

[587] “Hezbollah's Operations and Networks in the United States: Two Decades in Review,” 19-20.

[588] “Treasury Targets Hizballah Fundraising Network in the Triple Frontier of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.” US Department of the Treasury Press Release. December 6, 2006. Accessed May 31, 2024. <https://web.archive.org/web/20130623124755/https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/hp190.aspx>

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[592] See, e.g., “Hizballah Operative Sentenced to 40 Years in Prison for Covert Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah’s Islamic Jihad Organization.” US Department of Justice Press Release. December 3, 2019. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/hizballah-operative-sentenced-40-years-prison-covert-terrorist-activities-behalf-hizballah-s>; “New Jersey Man Indicted for Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah’s Islamic Jihad Organization,” US Department of Justice Press Release. September 19, 2019. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/new-jersey-man-indicted-terrorist-activities-behalf-hizballah-s-islamic-jihad-organization>; See also “U.S. Attorney Announces Terrorism Charges Against High-Ranking Hizballah Member Who Helped Plan 1994 Bombing In Buenos Aires, Argentina.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. December 20, 2023. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-attorney-announces-terrorism-charges-against-high-ranking-hizballah-member-who>

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[597] Information, *United States v. Samer El Debek* (1:19-cr-00073 S.D.N.Y. January 11, 2019); Indictment, *United States v. Ali Kourani*, (1:17-cr-00417 S.D.N.Y. June 28, 2017).

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[599] “Hizballah Operative Sentenced to 40 Years in Prison for Covert Terrorist Activities on Behalf of Hizballah’s Islamic Jihad Organization.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. December 3, 2019. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/hizballah-operative-sentenced-40-years-prison-covert-terrorist-activities-behalf/>

[600] Complaint, *United States v. Alexei Saab*, (1:19-cr-00676 S.D.N.Y. July 18, 2019).

[601] “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces Indictment Of New Jersey Man For Terrorist Activities On Behalf Of Hezbollah’s Islamic Jihad Organization.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. September 19, 2019. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/manhattan-us-attorney-announces-indictment-new-jersey-man-terrorist-activities-behalf>

[602] Indictment, *United States v. Alexei Saab*, (1:19-cr-00676 S.D.N.Y. September 19, 2019).

[603] *Ibid.*

[604] Verdict, *United States v. Alexei Saab*, (1:19-cr-00676 S.D.N.Y. May 11, 2022). The court ordered a retrial on one count, providing material support, as the jury could not agree on its decision at the trial.

[605] Judgment, *United States v. Alexei Saab*, (1:19-cr-00676 S.D.N.Y. June 5, 2023).

[606] “New Jersey Man Sentenced to 12 Years For Receiving Military-Type Training From Hezbollah, Marriage Fraud, and Making False Statements.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. May 23, 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/new-jersey-man-sentenced-12-years-receiving-military-type-training-hizballah-marriage>

[607] Levitt, Matthew. “Written Assessment by Canada’s Integrated Threat Assessment Center.” In *Hezbollah: The Global Footprint of Lebanon’s Party of God*. Hurst Publishers, 2013, 66.

[608] Bell, Stewart. “The Blame Game Redux.” *National Post*, December 5, 2013.

[609] See, e.g., *United States v. Hammoud et al.*, (3:00-cr-00147 W.D.N.C. 2000). “Mohammed Hassan Dbouk and his brother-in-law, Ali Adham Amhaz, ran the Canadian portion of

this [Charlotte cigarette smuggling] network under the command of Haj Hasan Hilu Laqis (Hezbollah’s chief military procurement officer). Their activities were funded in part with money that Laqis sent from Lebanon, in addition to their own criminal activities in Canada (e.g., credit card and banking scams). Among the items that they purchased in Canada and the U.S. and smuggled into Lebanon were night-vision goggles, global positioning systems, stun guns, naval equipment, nitrogen cutters and laser range finders. The Canadian Hezbollah network also sought to take out life insurance policies for Hezbollah operatives committing acts of terrorism in the Middle East.” Prepared Statement of Matthew Levitt, Senior Fellow and Director of Terrorism Studies, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee: 8. May 25, 2005. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/imo/media/doc/LevittTestimony.pdf>

[610] Levitt, “Hezbollah’s Criminal Networks: Useful Idiots, Henchmen, and Organized Criminal Facilitators,” 159.

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[614] “2018 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada, Terrorist Financing,” 19.

[615] See, e.g., “Nineteen Charged with Racketeering to Support Terrorist Organization.” United States Attorney’s Office, Eastern District of Michigan. PR Newswire. March 29, 2006. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://web.archive.org/web/20160311070315/http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/nineteen-charged-with-racketeering-to-support-terrorist-organization-70737752.html>, referring to *United States v. Haydous et al.*, (2:03-cr-80406 E.D. Mich. March 29, 2006). (a “global racketeering conspiracy” that was allegedly headquartered in Dearborn, Michigan but also operated in Canada, Lebanon, Brazil, Paraguay and China). See details enumerated in the First Superseding Indictment.

[616] Bell, *Cold Terror*, 118-119.

[617] “Canadian-Iranian Citizen Sentenced In White Plains Federal Court To 32 Months In Prison For Conspiring To Violate Iran Sanctions.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. December 15, 2017. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/canadian-iranian-citizen-sentenced-white-plains-federal-court-32-months-prison>

[618] See, e.g., “Hezbollah, one of the worst terrorist organizations—killing all these Americans around the world—was laundering proceeds of cocaine through the Lebanese Canadian Bank. They were operating like a major drug cartel.” Statement of Derek S. Maltz, former Director, U.S. Department of

Justice, Special Operations Division, and former Special Agent in Charge DEA Task Force, House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Hearing on “Attacking Hezbollah’s Financial Network: Policy Options,” June 8, 2017, 31-32. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20170608/106094/HHRG-115-FA00-Transcript-20170608.pdf>; See also “Manhattan U.S. Attorney Announces \$102 Million Settlement Of Civil Forfeiture And Money Laundering Claims Against Lebanese Canadian Bank.” US Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York Press Release. June 25, 2013. Accessed July 15, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/manhattan-us-attorney-announces-102-million-settlement-civil-forfeiture-and-money>

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[622] “An Examination of the Iranian Regime’s Threats to Homeland Security.” US House Homeland Security Committee, Republican. October 25, 2023. Accessed July 12, 2024.

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